



ファンタジア文庫





「お前がほくの式神か？  
なるほど、変わつてゐな、お前」  
それはまさに、  
深い夜の闇に差し込む、一縷の光だつた。

少年は、彼女の手を取り、  
そのまま引く張つて立たせ、連れ出した。  
座敷牢の外に、  
彼女の知らなかつた世界に。

太閤に嘲らされる中庭は、  
この世のものとも思えないほどの  
美しさだつた。



目次

一章 繋がる抵抗	7
二章 重なる波紋	111
三章 祭儀の日	225
四章 激突	318
五章 降りし者、越えし者	430
あとがき	505



Download all your Fav Light Novels from [Just Light Novels](#)

Stay up to date On Light Novels updates by Joining our DISCORD  
group





# **Chapter 1 - United Resistance**

# Part 1

Souma Takiko didn't remember the faces of her parents.

It wasn't that she had been left alone. She had lived together with her parents. But there had always been many adults around Takiko. There had been wet nurses caring for her and strict-looking old men. People who came from 'outside' and those striving to train themselves in magic. The rest of the adults had attended to Takiko just like her father and mother had. Thanks to that, Takiko didn't have any strong impression of any single one of the adults around her.

She was a child of the main bloodline and possessed a nature excellent for becoming a yorishiro[1].

Takiko was the foothold that her clan had been longing for in order to realize their dreams. To her parents she was simply the 'successor', rather than being 'their child'.

'When you grow up, you will become a god.'

For as long as she could remember, the adults around Takiko had told her that. The evidence that those words weren't just a lie or joke showed in the attention that the adults paid to her and the reverence with which they treated her.

In any case, Takiko was a child who required that attention.

Takiko spent her childhood at the base of a mountain revered as sacred, in a village that seemed separated from the rest of humanity. The area was surrounded by nature, due to being a place where spirit flow gathered, was full of aura all the time. Also, the area had an extraordinarily special spiritual nature due to magic that her clan had maintained for many years.

Being born to be a yorishiro, Takiko took in and was possessed by external aura from an early age. Takiko's ability to serve as a spiritual vessel, proof of her excellent shamanic nature, made things rather complicated and difficult for her. It was lucky if the aura Takiko took



in was harmless, but often the aura would cause trouble.

The adults paid deep attention to her and paid her a similar level of respect, as if acting as her attendants. It was as if she were a being of a higher level - in other words, as if she were worshiped as a 'god'.

Being a god was lonely.

But back then, Takiko hadn't known of the concept of 'loneliness'. She didn't suffer from feelings of loneliness. There were always many adults around Takiko, but not a single child like her. She wasn't been able to compare her environment to anyone else's.

In fact, Takiko hadn't known anything about the 'outside world'. She hadn't been taught. So, Takiko grew up simply accepting everything around her, both normal and abnormal. She didn't differentiate between special and ordinary.

Back then, the adults around Takiko had seemed the same as the deer and the boar of the mountain. Now, shockingly few memories remained of the ones who had spent a long time by her side. That was especially true for their faces. She almost couldn't recall anything about what their faces had been like.

That was also because she had lived viewed a god.

But there was one more reason.

Takiko first noticed that reason when she met a certain pair of people.

".....Her?"

"Right. Although when I met her before, she was still in diapers."

"But..... this is....."

"Yes. I heard of it, but she's really being neglected. I'm deeply interested in her for the sake of research, but it's quite shocking. As expected, the main family guys are still living in medieval times."

This was Takiko's favorite shrine.

An approximately twenty-jou[2] building outside the village, a place where adults couldn't approach without Takiko's permission. But these two people had casually stepped into her territory without permission and opened the door to the shrine.

At the time, Takiko was possessed by a somewhat evil-natured yin energy. The sash of the traditional miko outfit that the adults had put on her was untied, and the hems were worn down. The many cracks on the surface of the wooden floor and the peeling plaster of the wall were thanks to Takiko's spiritual power that no one had ever taught her about going out of control.

The aura that filled her was coagulated and sharply unbalanced towards yin, drawing forth even more yin aura. The aura inside the shrine was close to miasma.

And in its midst was Takiko, with her back against the wall and legs splayed out. Her neck turned towards the door of the shrine as she gazed at the two men standing in the entrance.

A girl whose bright, flame-like red hair left a strong impression.

But eyes were blank and unfocused and her mouth hung half-open. It was the yin aura possessing Takiko that moved her right now, rather than Takiko herself.

'Leave'. A bestial sound came from the young girl's mouth.

One of the two people smiled bitterly and scratched his head, while the other narrowed his eyes.

"Hahaha. It seems like we picked a bad day. Should we come back later, Kurahashi?"

".....Dairenji. If we don't do anything, at this rate she'll become a 'Type-Ogre'."



"Aah, you don't need to worry about that. She's not that brittle of a vessel. In any case, it almost looks like a Phase Five might show up. I've tested a lot of things on my daughter, but she can't compare to the real thing. It's too bad, but that girl's no good."

Saying that, the man put a hand to his chest and bowed very respectfully towards Takiko. And with that, he turned right around and left the shrine.

But the other man didn't follow him. Taking off his shoes, he headed silently into the shrine.

The man who left turned around. "Oi, Kurahashi," he said. But the other man didn't listen to him and headed straight towards Takiko.

The aura inside Takiko writhed and the aura around her became restless. The aura reacted to the man's disobeying the order and approaching and bared its fangs.

In that moment,

'Clap',

The man clasped his hands together as if praying.

For how many years had Takiko been unable to forget her shock from that moment?

The man's clap was full of magical energy. That magical energy instantly drove off the yin aura inside the shrine and cleansed away the aura possessing Takiko.

It was as if she had been doused with a tremendous amount of cold water without any warning.

Takiko was completely surprised. Her eyes widened.

It had only been a single instant, and yet a simple clap had purified all the aura. This man's ability was amazing.

The Takiko from back then had been unable to understand the power



of the Onmyoudou that the man had casually showed her. The adults around her were able to do similar things - if not with the expertise of this man.

But the people who treated her like the clan's shaman princess had never shown this to her.

It was the first clear act of 'resistance' that she had experience since birth. A 'will' shown by 'someone else'.

It was no exaggeration to say that the 'worship' that this man showed Takiko destroyed the laws of the world she had lived in with a single clap.

The man who had left smiled pleasantly.

"Take it easy. If the village people saw something like that, it would raise a big ruckus."

As he expected, the man in front of him didn't respond to is jokingly-delivered line. He stared at Takiko, thinking, and then lowered down and sat in seiza right there, facing her direction.

Kurahashi. The man had been called that. He was Kurahashi.

Takiko looked closely at Kurahashi, as if it was her first time seeing a 'human'. And Kurahashi looked straight back at Takiko's face.

His face, sternly stiffened like a statue,

".....Good eyes."

...loosened slightly.

And then Takiko noticed.

None of the adults who had been around her until now had looked at Takiko in this manner. Their faces had been downturned, and they had come to attend to Takiko hat in hand without meeting her gaze.

But Kurahashi wasn't that way. Takiko was now able to freely observe another human's face for the first time.

"It's nice to meet you, princess of the Souma. Souma Takiko-kun. My name is Kurahashi Genji. The man behind me is named Dairenji Shidou. We came here hoping to walk the road of Onmyoudou together with you."

"....."

Takiko listened to the seated Kurahashi's voice without uttering a word.

From the entrance, the other man said,

"Hey, Kurahashi. That girl's still seven, you know."

"My showing respect has no relation to age. It's not as if I'm rearing her."

".....I did think that your girl was around the same age as her, but this is certainly different from how you are at home, isn't it."

Though Dairenji said this as if in amazement, Kurahashi didn't respond to him this time. He continued looking at Takiko without moving his gaze away even once.

Takiko couldn't understand what Kurahashi had said at all. After all, Souma Takiko hadn't even been able to recall her own name instantly.

Only three other names managed to linger in her mind. Kurahashi Genji, who was right in front of her. The other man, Dairenji Shidou.

And also--

".....What about Tsuchimikado Yakou?"

Takiko's question made Kurahashi's expression loosen again. The other person behind him - Dairenji - smiled at this unexpected development. Speaking of whom, Dairenji looked straight at Takiko again as well. The two of them were a different kind of adult from the ones Takiko knew.

"I'll tell you."

Kurahashi slowly announced.

"He is the one who created the fate of us three. He is the great Onmyouji who once created the golden age of magic - and who lives even now, in the modern age."





## Part 2

'I hope you can relay the message.'

'He' had said to her.

She hadn't been conscious of what 'he' had said - 'he' had spoken with her many times about how that was so that she would not have any memories of it. The movement of the stars had aligned. But their conversation had been more of a primitive transfer of feelings, and seemed difficult to transform into language. So it seemed like she was unable to remember anything extraneous.

But 'he' had spoken again.

Naturally, she would have to remember it this time. The connection had gotten interrupted before, after all. She was perplexed. It was quite hard on her, for him to suddenly tell her to do something that she had never been able to do. But 'he' had said 'don't worry' so cheerfully.

The effects of Taizan Fukun still remain right now. You'll surely be able to remember.

Okay?

She started getting more and more impatient after 'he' spoke so leisurely. Even if he said 'don't worry', she didn't have any confidence in herself. Also, his relaxed attitude actually implicitly made it even more important, even if 'he' didn't expressly say so.

Hold on a moment. It's not possible. But he had moved on, leaving her utterly shocked self behind.

The only way she could bring everything together now was to transmit her soul.[\[3\]](#)

The gods were ever-present.

This was true for all worlds simultaneously.

So...



".....So..... eh? W-What.....?"

She suddenly became aware that she was mumbling quietly.

As her consciousness abruptly resurfaced, her clouded thoughts cleared up. At the same time, something that was in those clouds vanished like smoke.

She tried to grab for it, but tragically the memory slipped between her fingers. All that remained was a hint of wetness on the tips of her fingers.<sup>[4]</sup> ".....Nn." That chilly sensation made her uneasy, and she grimaced and fidgeted.

Then, Souma Akino opened her eyelids.

.....A dream?

In her head that was still hazy from waking up was a vestige of the dream she had just seen. A nostalgic feeling from somewhere or other. The trace sadness that came from it made her chest twinge.

In any case, the sensation was momentary. Akino immediately focused her consciousness on the reality before her.

...Huh? This place is.....

What Akino noticed was that she was somewhere she didn't recognize. A wide, tatami-matted room. She seemed to have been sleeping on top of a spread futon. She got up out of surprise.

"Hey."

She practically jumped.

The voice came from the girl sitting in seiza in front of the desk in a corner of the room. It was a girl she knew. Souma Takiko. That vivid red hair was unmistakable.

....Right. Harutora-kun was controlling me!

It had been evening. Akino, who had fled out of their warehouse hiding place alone, had been taken over by the 'Full Moon' inside her and had connected spiritually with the fugitive Tsuchimikado Harutora. Harutora had used magic remotely. In the middle of that, Dairenji Suzuka had showed up to take Akino back, and then <emph>she</emph> - Souma Takiko - had shown herself before the two of them.

Then, Tsuchimikado Natsume and Ato Touji had rushed to Akino and the others and Takiko's defensive shikigami Yashamaru and Kumomaru had shown up as well, sparking a confrontation. To be honest, they hadn't had any chance of victory. Akino and the rest would have fallen at the enemies' hands.

Harutora had linked with Akino, with the 'Full Moon' taking over her again. He saw their plight and made a plan. He controlled Akino to perform the Far Step magic. And with it, she traversed the spirit flow to move far away from that place - or had intended to, but Takiko and her two defensive familiars had gotten pulled in and moved far away... together with Akino, who had performed Far Step. In other words, Akino had become the enemy's prisoner in order to save Natsume and the others.

She very quickly recalled her memories and emotions from back then. But Akino's memories since jumping through the spirit flow were blank. It seemed that she had lost consciousness and slept since then.

She was now away from her companions and alone inside the enemy encampment. Akino's cognizance of that reality made her whole body stiffen up.

Takiko watched Akino with a slightly sad, troubled smile.

"You don't have to worry. I won't hurt you."

"....."

Akino looked wordlessly at Takiko. Rather than resistance, her lack of a response was simply because she was too nervous to form words. Though she was fully aware of this, she wasn't able to summon up any courage.

Moreover,

...This person is strange somehow.....

She had felt the same thing the first time they had met, but this girl named Takiko had some kind of strange atmosphere around her. This girl was no less strange than the eccentric practitioners of Seishuku Temple, who had clearly been different from normal people. But Takiko's abnormalness was of a different kind compared to anyone who had been at the temple.

If she had to elaborate, she would describe it as something occultish, something similar to having a strong aura. She could feel an extremely strong spiritual presence from Takiko. But the root of Akino's feeling was not 'power'. It felt something like Takiko was 'far away' or 'higher' than she was in some occult sense. Of course, Akino had no clue of any reasons why this was.

However, during Takiko's momentary smile just now, she hadn't felt that vague strangeness. Akino slowly suppressed her nerves as she watched Takiko.

".....U-Um....."

"Hm?"

"Where..... is this?"

She fearfully tried asking a question. "Mm." Takiko returned a sound showing her pleasure that Akino's vocal cords were working.

"This is one of the buildings owned by the Souma. You didn't seem like you'd be waking up after losing consciousness from using Far Step. So I brought you here for now. We had a base in a different hotel before, but that spot was found out."

Takiko explained to Akino in a very amicable tone. From her demeanor, it felt like she was going to give Akino room to calm down.

"You slept through the whole night after that. Seemed like you forced yourself quite a bit."

"The whole night.....!"

Unfortunately, there was no window in the room. But come to think of it, she had the satiated feeling of having gotten lots of sleep. Her stamina was also recovered.

...But this means.....

It was now March 1st. Akino gritted her teeth at that.

And,

"...Princess. Excuse me."

Accompanied by a sudden voice, the aura inside the room wavered and the figure of a young man suddenly appeared. Akino's expression suddenly contorted and she took a guarded stance on top of the futon.

The young man wore a dress shirt and slacks. He wore a monocle and looked intellectual, but his slight smile was chilly, if not cold. A smile like a clear stream with a single drop of poison mixed into it.

He was Takiko's defensive shikigami, Yashamaru.

"With regard the earlier incident, it seems like we hit the mark. As you might expect, it was empty."

"I see. Is there anything that might turn troublesome?"

"We've taken care of everything."

Takiko nodded lightly at the shikigami's sharply-delivered report.

Then, she turned her gaze to Akino, and said:

"We've found the place Harutora was hiding."

Akino's eyes widened.

"That said, just like you heard, it seems like he's already changed locations. He hasn't slipped up."

" ....."

Akino bit her lip as she looked at Takiko.

The place Harutora had been hiding was the deserted house place that had appeared in her mind while she had been connected to the 'Full Moon'. Even though she had been told they escaped, her heartbeat still sped up.

Also,

...What about Natsume and the others? What happened to them afterwards?

What she was thinking seemed to show on her face. Takiko smiled softly.

"I think Natsume and the others are fine. Also, we didn't do anything at all while you were sleeping. Like drawing out Natsume's location, for example."

Akino paled upon hearing that, finally noticing the danger that being captured by the enemy presented. Takiko wasn't lying about what she claimed, right? Imagining it made her shiver.

On the other hand, the shikigami shrugged at his master's words.

"It was the princess's orders. ....It's true that being careless with you might have unknown effects on the 'Full Moon' inhabiting you. In any case, once you fell into our hands, they would have left their hideout right away."

He said to Akino and her anxious expression.

"But, we have put a light seal on you. If not, our location could have

been disclosed through the 'Full Moon' connection."

Akino sat up straight again upon hearing about the seal. She reached out and touched the top of her head. It seemed like her rabbit ears wouldn't materialize.

Cheerfully, Yashamaru said:

"Well, if you really want to, we could let you materialize those cute ears of yours. Although we'd have to surround you in a barrier to cut off any connection to the outside. The princess's safety is the first priority at this point in time. Targeting the princess would be the fastest way to turn the tables, after all. You'll have to bear with us."

Akino understood what Yashamaru was saying. Natsume's group - and of course Harutora - understood that Takiko was crucial to the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual that Takiko's group was planning. Right now, Takiko's group had the overwhelming advantage. And like Yashamaru said, Takiko could directly sway the fight.

Takiko was simultaneously the trump card and the Achilles' Heel of the Souma and Kurahashi.

"At any rate, you are part of the Souma bloodline. We won't treat you poorly, so please don't be worried, Akino-kun."

Saying that, Yashamaru smiled softly. But she couldn't stop worrying no matter what he said. On the contrary, the young man's amicable smile made her raise her guard.

This was enemy territory.

And Takiko and Yashamaru were Akino's enemies.

".....Well then. I was a bit worried, but your condition doesn't seem bad. There's someone who wants to take this opportunity to meet you. Can you come over here?"

Saying that, Takiko stood up. Akino startled reflexively.

But,

"...Akino."

When she heard that voice, her nervousness somehow melted away like frost in the sunlight. She herself was even surprised at her rapid change in emotions.

She felt relief.

Along with that, she was wrapped in a feeling of absolute safety and comfort that was completely out of the ordinary. It was her first experience like this.

Yashamaru's eyes narrowed as if in satisfaction, giving his master a side-glance from behind her. Akino stood up unsteadily, walking up to Takiko's side as if drawn to her.

She stepped out of the room. Here was the entranceway where shoes were removed. On the side was a door that looked like it led to a bathroom. Takiko opened the door, and in front of it was a linoleum corridor continuing forward. It was slightly odd, but perhaps this building had been a ryokan[5] before it had been bought.

Takiko left the corridor. Akino and Yashamaru followed behind her.

Takiko walked to the end of the corridor and went down the stairs. She went down one flight and then another. There were no more windows in the corridor anymore, so they must have descended underground. The stairs ended there, and Takiko walked into the corridor.

She stopped in front of a door. Unlike the previous room, this door had heavy-duty magical seals placed on it that even Akino's eyes could recognize. Yashamaru got in front and released the complicated seals. Then, he opened the door and moved to the side.

Takiko went in the room. Akino followed after her. It was a room with the same layout as the one before. Two men and a woman were in the tatami-floored main area as they entered.

A large-statured, middle-aged man and a woman of similar age who looked willowy in comparison. They cast barbed looks at Takiko as she entered, but their expressions changed when they saw Akino.



The same went for Akino.

"Akino-chan!?"

"Chizuru-san! Takahiro-san!?"

In the room were Harutora's adoptive parents, Tsuchimikado Chizuru and Takahiro. The two of them had been living together with Akino and Natsume before.

When the Onmyou Agency had surprise-attacked Kichijouji Temple where the Tsuchimikados had been hiding, Akino and Natsume had coincidentally been away and had managed to escape. But Takahiro, Chizuru, and Harutora's true father Tsuchimikado Yasuzumi had been captured and taken away by the Onmyou Agency. Akino and the others had been unable to investigate into their circumstances since then and had been in the dark about their well-being.

But, Chizuru and Takahiro looked well. They seemed unharmed.

She had been anxious from being brought into the enemy encampment alone. That was now overturned by her joy at meeting Chizuru and the others again, and Akino's eyes began to water. She ran over to Chizuru to embrace her. Chizuru also approached her as if to welcome her, hugging the teary-eyed girl.

Chizuru and the others had been captured just four days prior. But looking at their faces now, Akino felt as if they had been separated forever.

Chizuru gently patted Akino as she said:

"Akino-chan, I'm glad you're alright.....!"

"Ch-Chizuru-san too!"

Akino cried out as she looked up. Takahiro looked warmly at his wife and the girl. But when he turned to Yashamaru, his gaze was sharper than a knife and colder than ice.

Yashamaru smiled wryly at that gaze full of distrust and suspicion.

"You understand by 'looking' at her, right Takahiro-kun? We haven't done anything to her other than blocking her connection to the outside."

".....Why is she here?"

"Well, a lot of things happened. ....Aah, but you don't need to worry about 'that'. Tsuchimikado Natsume and the rest are still on the run. We caught up to them once, but this girl gave herself up to let them escape."

Hearing Yashamaru's words, Takahiro and Chizuru turned to at Akino with faces of surprise. Noticing their looks, Akino shook her head.

"That's not it. Harutora-kun helped me, that's all....."

Upon hearing that, Takahiro's and Chizuru's eyes went round.

Yashamaru chuckled at their reactions, his shoulders bobbing up and down.

"I predicted as much, but it seems like the entire Tsuchimikado family failed to notice the 'Full Moon'. Well, it was inherited by the Souma, so that's not impossible."

"'Full Moon'? What are you talking about...?"

Mumbling that, Takahiro gasped and looked back at Akino. His face was rigid with regret and surprise. Chizuru furrowed her brows suspiciously at her husband's reaction.

"Could it be..... the moon rabbit....."

"Aha, it seems like at least Chizuru-kun who was born into the Tsuchimikado has some knowledge of it. Well, I think it's inevitable that you'd be surprised. We were astonished too. Although we didn't spend months together with her, of course. In any case, she's 'Souma' Akino."

Yashamaru glanced at Akino as he spoke.

Akino looked uneasily at Takahiro, but then Chizuru hugged her

again. Chizuru's eyes told her that everything was alright. Having Chizuru and Takahiro next to her gave her dauntless courage.

But, one thing she was curious about was.....

".....Chizuru-san. Where's Yasuzumi-san? You aren't together?"

She lightly pulled on Chizuru's arm as she asked. Chizuru and Takahiro silently looked at each other.

She had a bad premonition for a moment, but:

"It's alright. He's safe too. He's in a different place right now."

Takiko was the one to answer Akino's question.

But her tone was curt and cold.

"He's a stubborn man. ....We knew that, but we didn't expect his sense of duty as the Tsuchimikado family head - as the successor of Yakou's will. ....But don't take it as if we're harming him. I hope you believe me. It might be a bit unpleasant to hear me say it, but..... we don't have any need for that anymore.[\[6\]](#)"

The lines Takiko casually delivered packed a punch. It was a force brimming with self-confidence. The 'strange atmosphere' she had felt from Takiko seemed to materialize. A foreign aura that was distant and unhuman. Akino shivered.

Perhaps it had to do with the 'god's descent' that Natsume had talked about. In any case, the atmosphere that Takiko gave off sometimes was that 'inhuman'.

"What the princess says is correct. You're the Tsuchimikado, after all. We don't want to be cruel, but who knows that schemes you'd come up with if we kept the three of you in the same place. That's why we're keeping Yasuzumi-kun in a different location. To put it plainly, he's something like a hostage. Personally, I'd like to spend some time with each one of you, but... unfortunately, we don't have time for that."

Yashamaru said this apologetically, making it seem like it was no lie.

Akino still looked up at Takahiro and Chizuru. Then, she noticed.

...Their foreheads.

On their foreheads was drawn an 'X' mark. The same curse mark that had been on Suzuka's forehead. But the ones on them were a size bigger than Suzuka's. They probably went farther than Suzuka's and completely sealed away their magical power.

Takahiro and Chizuru were first-rate Onmyouji. And Yasuzumi, who was in a different location, was gifted with the power of 'divination'. Negligence could not be permitted while they were in captivity. It was nothing but natural for the Souma to take the measure of sealing their magical power.

"Yashamaru."

When Takiko gave the order, the shikigami nodded respectfully, turned towards Takahiro and Chizuru, and began explaining the sequence of events behind Akino's capture. The events were related to Yesterday evening's incident. They were already informed of the events that led up to it - such as the surprise attack on Kichijouji Temple and Natsume meeting up with the other academy students. How many times had the Souma held this kind of conversation with the Tsuchimikado before Akino came here?

Takahiro and Chizuru's faces darkened as Yashamaru spoke. It was obvious, but that was how grim their situation was.

Their expressions stiffened the most when they heard that the Divine General Kogure Zenjirou had fallen at the hands of Yashamaru. Akino hadn't known of that either.

Yesterday, Natsume and the others had left the warehouse they had been hiding in in order to meet Kogure. But come to think of it, Natsume and Touji had been the only ones who came running to Akino and Suzuka. At that time, she should have known that they had failed to meet Kogure.

".....Did you kill him?"

A shiver ran down Akino's back when she heard Takahiro's level

voice.

Yashamaru smiled devilishly.

"Why, of course not. Miyachi-kun would be upset if we did. He's just sealed and unconscious. Honestly, we're so busy that we don't have time to fool around with him. So he'll just be sleeping like this. ....It's a mere three days, anyway. He won't die."

"....."

Takahiro looked away from Yashamaru without a word. Akino clenched her fists unconsciously.

A mere three days. There were no better words to describe the 'grim situation' that Akino and the others were in right now. In these three days, Akino and the others had to turn the tides.

Akino could no longer do anything but pray.

.....No, maybe there was something? Something that Akino could do in captivity.

...'I hope you can relay the message'.

".....Eh?"

Akino let out a sound, feeling as if she had heard a voice from somewhere. Chizuru, who was hugging her, was the only one who noticed. "Akino-chan?" She quietly asked. But Akino couldn't reply.

...Who was that just now?

Feeling as if she had forgotten something important, Akino desperately searched through her mind. But nothing came to her.

An anxiety that she didn't understand the reason behind ate at her heart. Akino continued clinging to Chizuru's arms as she desperately dug through her memories.



We'd like to talk with just the three of us. There had been no reason to listen to Takahiro's request, but Takiko had permitted it and left the room leaving Akino behind. After all, they had only been granted ten minutes. And as evidenced by the magical power seal, Yashamaru wasn't going to underestimate the Tsuchimikados one bit.

Only three days left.

But, there were still three days.

And it was inconceivable that Harutora would be sitting still. Because of that, Takiko's side had to pay close attention.

She had mentioned it to Akino before, but Harutora's best strategy right now was to aim for Takiko, the crux of the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual. Assassinating Takiko would immediately turn the tables. And Harutora wasn't the only one potentially taking aim at Takiko. The former Divine General Ohtomo Jin, whose whereabouts were as unknown as usual, was also somewhere. He in particular had carried out 'those kinds of jobs' many times during his period of active duty.

"Please be careful."

"...I know."

The master and servant exchanged brief words in the corridor outside the room.

And,

".....So here's where you were."

A young man materialized with that calm voice. An unrefined-looking young man wearing a parka. He was Kumomaru, one of Takiko's defensive shikigami alongside Yashamaru.

Yashamaru said:

"How was it?"

"As expected, I couldn't confirm."

"Any motion in the editorial department?"

"Nothing particular right now. It looks certain that she was acting independently, and it doesn't seem like she's come in contact with them since. If she's alive, she'll contact them eventually. The editorial department will get suspicious if news stops coming for a while."

"Hm..... Having only three days left puts us in a delicate situation. Speak to Kurahashi and get some people moving. Just to make sure, have the editorial department marked."

Yashamaru made a slightly difficult face at Kumomaru's report.  
"What's going on?" Asked Takiko.

In response,

"It's about the magazine journalist who was working with Kogure."

Yashamaru explained.

"We ought to have taken her into custody, but we put it off until after our fight with Kogure-kun..... When Kurahashi's Mystical Investigators arrived at the scene, she had already disappeared from the hotel. We couldn't catch her."

Wakamiya Rika, reporter for the 'Monthly Onmyouji', had partnered with Kogure and was drawing near the shadows of the Onmyou Agency upper echelon - in other words, Yashamaru and Takiko's plot. No, perhaps she had even 'arrived'. As Yashamaru said, they ought to have gotten ahold of her somehow, like they had gotten Kogure.

That said, she posed a much smaller threat compared to Kogure. They had thought there was no harm in putting off taking her into custody. After all, it would be impossible for an ordinary woman to escape from such an intense magic battlefield, or so they had presumed.

But when things quieted down and they had moved on to search for her, Wakamiya had vanished splendidly. Without a doubt,

Yashamaru had been mistaken.

"My apologies for the failure. But her laptop was left behind in the hotel. We're still analyzing it, but she won't be able to access any of the evidence she was holding onto. Even if she speaks up now, it won't change anything. We're keeping an eye on the editorial department just to be sure, but we think that's sufficient in this case."

If it were a month before Hinamatsuri, they would have to investigate this even if it meant making use of the rank-and-file. It would have been a clear choice if there were ten days - no, even five days until then.

But now Hinamatsuri was the day after tomorrow. Now that they had come this far, it was fair to say there was nothing that a single common reporter could do.

Takahiro and the others calmly accepted it, but in fact, now that the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual was in its final stages, it was debatable whether they Yashamaru and the others needed them as hostages any longer. They had to be on guard for Harutora first and foremost, and after that Ohtomo. And then Natsume's group. With all that, they didn't have the time to care about a single magazine editor.

In Yashamaru's opinion, it was best if Takiko sat quietly and did nothing.

And,

"Understood. But....."

"Yes?"

"A festival ought to be rowdy."

She spoke like she was talking to herself. "Princess?" With a glint in his eyes, Yashamaru queried her intentions.

But Takiko didn't say anything more. She just turned to her defensive shikigami, making a bewitching smile.



## Part 3

A familiar scent filled the bathroom.

It was a slightly sweet scent she was well acquainted with. As she sat on the edge of the dry bathtub, Natsume quietly closed her eyes and immersed herself in the fragrance.

She tried to 'look' at the spell that she was well aware was laid on her. But 'seeing' the spell laid on her own soul as impossible as looking at her own face without a mirror. She had tried it countless times before, and was unable to decipher the spell this time either. The most she could do was get a vague feel of it.

Even so, she knew that the spell was working well overall. Of course, that didn't mean that it had recovered from its slow unraveling, but she certainly wasn't on the brink of death at this moment. Rather, the matter of importance was when that 'moment' would come.

The dragon Hokuto resided in Natsume. Hokuto was partially merged with Natsume due to the spell cast on her, and by the power of the soul-settling incense she was finally granted a reprieve from the tension that the presence of the dragon induced, which always made her feel stretched thin.

Natsume thanked the shikigami inside of her. She slowly circulated her spiritual power, repairing her aura's balance.

She had been cooped up alone for about one hour.

.....Okay.

She was alright now. Concluding that, Natsume opened her eyes and slowly lifted herself up.

She checked the condition of her physical body next. For now, she didn't notice any irregularities to make her worried, but there hadn't been any portents before yesterday's episode. Impressing upon herself that she couldn't be careless, Natsume took the soul-settling incense

and left the room.

She exited the corridor and went into the living room.

"Ah, Natsume-chan. Are you okay now?"

"Yes. Sorry for making you worry."

Momoe Tenma asked anxiously about her condition, and Natsume answered him with a smile. "Thank goodness." Kurahashi Kyouko smiled from next to him. She had taken quite some time to very carefully regulate her aura, so perhaps she had made them worry for no reason.

In addition to Tenma and Kyouko, the living room contained Touji, Suzuka, and the wheelchair-bound Amami Daizen. They were in the middle of finishing the lunch they had bought from a convenience store. They had all suddenly stopped upon seeing Natsume.

Turning his wheelchair around, Amami said:

"Is that soul-settling incense enough on its own? It's just an emergency measure we dug up, after all. It's far lower quality than the stuff the Tsuchimikado family uses."

"No, I think it's enough. It doesn't feel very different, and I adjusted for differences in strength. Please give my thanks to Fujiwara-sensei. We asked for something so rare in such a short time..... but thanks to him, I'm still alive."

"He'll be happy to hear that. But thank him yourself. After we finish everything."

Amami grinned as he said that, snapping his fan with his hand.

Natsume and the others were currently hiding out in the old Roppongi mansion that Touji and Amami had used before. It was one of the safehouses that Amami used. They had been at a rented warehouse up until yesterday, but they had now abandoned that site.

The scene of Akino, Takiko and the others being sucked into the spirit flow right in front of her eyes was still fresh in Natsume's mind,

as if it had been burned into her eyes. She hadn't realized what had been happening, but had almost fallen into a panic when she grasped the situation.

But thanks to the commotion Kogure had raised, Mystical Investigators had started gathering in the vicinity. Natsume and the rest made contact with Amami, and upon hearing of the situation, he had decided to abandon the rented warehouse right then and there.

He had no other choice now that Akino had fallen into enemy hands. In fact, they had to withdraw immediately. Amami had instructed Touji to evacuate to the Roppongi safehouse and had left the rented warehouse himself. He had waited for the dead of night and then met back up with them.

"I didn't think we'd be coming back here..... Damn."

Touji grumbled idly after they had regrouped. Amami calmly responded.

"It's not that we've returned back to square one, Touji. We're laying low here, and we've got allies with us."

He spoke as if he had considered the possibility of having to move out of fear that their hiding place would be exposed as a result of their joint plan with Kogure failing. But though he said that, no one recognized how tough their current situation was more than Amami. Touji quickly withdrew his complaints, grimacing.

The mansion was a 2LDK[7] It was a big cramped with the number of people they had, but the circumstances required it. In fact, perhaps they were lucky to still have a command center given the situation.

The biggest problem was Tenma's shikigami Hama. The heavy, over-three-ton mechanical-type shikigami H1 Hama was the crucial means of transport for Natsume and the others, but it attracted attention. The reason they had chosen the warehouse in the first place was because there had been no other place to store Hama.

In the end, Natsume and the others had managed to hide Hama on the <emph> roof </emph> of the mansion. They had used

Suzuka's shikigami to lift it up there. They were covering it with a blue tarp for now, but it was a matter of time before another resident or the management noticed it. It was unfortunate, but this was all they could do.

.....There was nowhere else left to go.....

Natsume thought as she looked at the figures of her friends gathered in the living room. Kogure had been captured. But in addition, now that they had confronted Takiko directly, she truly felt like this was the 'deciding moment'. And also, through Akino she had gotten in touch with Harutora - the childhood friend she had been searching for all this time.

"Natsume-chan, here."

Tenma handed Natsume her share of onigiri.

Honestly, she didn't have much appetite, but Amami had instructed that their everyday meals had become a 'responsibility'. It was extremely important that Natsume and the others stay in top condition for a potential battle at any moment. Natsume thanked Tenma and took the onigiri he offered.

".....Well then."

Amami said, snapping his fan again.

After checking that Natsume had recovered, they considered the situation as they ate and discussed their next moves. Akino was first and foremost on her mind.

"I hope she's alright....."

"Yeah....."

Tenma nodded at Natsume's gloomy comment.

They had concluded from yesterday's discussion that Akino wasn't in too much danger with Takiko's group.

Takiko's group didn't gain anything from harming Akino. Maybe they

would get a bit of information from her, but they already knew pretty much everything that Akino did, so they likely weren't expecting much out of Akino as an information source. In the first place, Takiko's group could easily get that information using magic if they wanted to. They didn't have any need to intentionally hurt Akino.

Also, the 'Full Moon' inside Akino was Tsuchimikado Yakou's magical tool, meant to be paired with the 'Raven's Wing' that Harutora had. They would probably avoid doing anything abnormal to her, and Takiko's side didn't have the time or manpower to research her in the first place. Ultimately, it made sense for them to just leave her alone.

And more than anything, regardless of what side she was on, Akino was a 'Souma'. Considering Takiko's personality and what Suzuka had said of her meeting Akino, she wouldn't do anything bad - Natsume and the other so concluded.

Of course, this wasn't for sure, and it was more self-reassurance than anything else. They knew they had to save her as quickly as possible, but that would clearly be difficult. It was painful to have to trust their enemies, but there was nothing they could do but believe in Takiko's mercy.

And Akino wasn't the only pressing matter.

"To be honest, it's quite bad that Kogure's been taken. We've lost any chance of winning cleanly."

Amami said in a flat voice that he had pushed his emotion out of. That was also something they had concluded yesterday night, but their expression stiffened upon hearing it.

"Of course, all that we've lost is the chance of a 'clean' victory. We haven't lost for sure yet. But it'll require some clever tricks to turn the tables from where we are now. Of course, the risks will increase."

".....Have you thought about what specifically we're going to do next?"

Amami shrugged at Kyouko's answer.

"Speaking logically, we should attack Souma Takiko directly, but...

yesterday's event clearly showed that we have no chance of winning when she has her Yase Doji with her. Well, even if we were trying to do that, we can't figure out where she is."

"What if I divined where she was..."

"Would that work? According to you all, Souma Takiko's become something like a living spirit - or like a 'god'. Never mind the fact that it's hard to divine anything about living spirits, but they're probably guarding themselves well. They won't stay long at any place that could be easily found."

Takiko was the key to their enemies' ritual. No, even more than just the ritual, she was the symbol of the Souma. It was because of Takiko that the Souma had spent these years preparing and had carried out this plan. She could be called the center of everything right now.

This very fact reminded them once again of yesterday, that very moment -- the rare chance of confronting Takiko. It was due to luck they are able to confront Takiko, not only that, she was acting alone, without her strong guards Yashamaru and Kumomaru accompanying her.

In contrast, their team that was present consist of Natsume, Touji and Suzuka, the frontline battle ready members. If they were talking about using [Battle] as a means to change the tide, this can be argued to be the most ideal condition.

However, in reality, the battle ended without starting, due to Touji in his seal released oni form not able to go against Takiko.

Four years ago, during the Great Hinamatsuri Purification terrorist attack, Yashamaru – Dairenji Shidou caused Touji to be possessed by oni. Furthermore, the spirit Yashamaru tried to summon was indeed Taira no Masakado, resulting Touji not being able to use his oni powers against the descendants of Taira no Masakado, namely Takiko.

"If only I did not stubbornly used my oni powers, capturing Takiko... I can't stand this, how can I be so careless."

“No, I am responsible for this incident, I should have assist you immediately.”

“... If you put it that way, then I should be the one bearing the most responsibility, after all I confronted her for such a long time....”

“Nothing of that sort, Suzuka, didn’t you already inform us immediately? It was us, we rushed to the scene and --”

Looking at the youngsters speaking up for each other, Amami felt frustrated, before he could speak, “Everyone, let’s stop talking about this”, Kyouko said plainly.

“If everyone wants to take the responsibility, then people like us who only can stay here will have to take some responsibility as well, that said, every one of us here are responsible for this. Reflecting on our mistakes is important, but what is the use of sitting here and shifting the blame.”

Kyouko, holding a sandwich in her hand, speaks in a serious tone, her expression looks stern. Who knows if she purposely expresses herself in such a manner, but her intentions are made very clear. “um, I feel the same as well.” Tenma said quickly. Touji, Natsume and Suzuka exchanged looks with each other while feeling complicated.

“... Such is the situation right now, if you all think that you are careless, turn this feeling of bitterness into strength.” Amami shrug, concluded. Next, he looked away suddenly, “Besides....” Making a face full of thoughts, continued.

“... From what I hear from your discussion, right now Souma Takiko is giving out a **dangerous** aura, it may be a good thing that you guys did not start a battle with her”

“Is it due to the effects of seance?”

“I’m afraid so, however since I did not personally [see] for myself, this is just my personal feeling...”

Amami did not say this to comfort them, he truly felt that they should not initiate a battle carelessly, Natsume, who got to meet Takiko face to face, agreed with Amami’s views.

Even though they took action yesterday solely based on momentum, however, at that point of time Souma Takiko indeed have something like a [not tolerating infringement] aura around her.

This time, Natsusme felt deeply moved by Takiko. In her eyes, Takiko is just a girl that is the same age as her.

Affected by the strings of fate brought on by the ancestors of the Onmyou world, what if this girl is just a bit strange, but is a normal girl that could be found anywhere on the everyday streets. They had opposing views, but she is just like herself, Natsume even have a strange feeling of empathy with her.





This is not a problem of what is real and what is elusive, Takiko is very true to herself.

However, she is the [enemy] without a doubt, even with this empty feeling of sadness, this is still an undeniable fact.

Natsume – and everyone else cannot lose to her.

“Anyways let’s talk about our next move. Even though we agree on discussing, the general direction did not change... in fact, we are only left with this method. The method of using Onmyouji Monthly Magazine that have contact with Kyouko, to put up articles online to expose Chief Kurahashi, at the same time rely on Touji’s network to persuade member of parliament, Naota Kouzou, using the power of the government to temporary stop the actions of Onmyou Agency.”

With the publisher exposing the enemy’s crimes and with politicians freezing the enemy’s greatest assets – supervision powers and organisational powers. This method arguably is a direct attack method, Amami previously did not resort to using this method is due to the fact they did not have [Evidence].

In the eyes of normal people, magic is something difficult to understand and mysterious, to describe in a more extremely way, it is a world where [anything can happen]. It’s because of this, it is very difficult to go against the power of Onmyou Agency just with the statements made by Amami, Natsume and everyone else. In order to use this method to win against Kurahashi, Amami must use all the influence he have in the magic world to ask for assistance, that is why, they were originally hoping for the previous independent exorcist, Kogure, to make a public appeal.

However, the situation now does not allow them to be hesitant. As Amami mentioned earlier, even they are going to use [reckless methods], if they cannot change their current situation, they are as good as waiting for death.

Using this method this time, other than [winning] Kurahashi, more importantly, they want to limit the enemy's movements.

“The ritual will be on 3rd of March – it has been confirmed that the event will be held in 2 days’ time. In that case, exposing them in a large scale, shaking Onmyou Agency, even though we only have a few days, as long as we can slow their actions down, it will be very meaningful... no matter what kind of sentence we will get later.”

It means, this does not ensure victory, it’s a way of surprise attack without thinking of consequences. Even though it is not what Amami, a tactician, would suggest, at this point in time they were left with no other solution.

This is definitely not a method that will succeed easily.

“Right now, the greatest problem is not having enough time, even though we are living in the times of information society, in order to attract people’s -- especially the [upper echelons] attention, time is still required. If we are to move carelessly and let our enemy realise our plans, it will be meaningless, our opponent is making a move in the name of [Anti spiritual disaster terrorism]. If we want to stop them, the people who we are stopping will need to have certain determination, so we need to convince those people, allowing them to be determined, this is seriously a very difficult task.”

Amami sighed while saying, yet his tone carries a hint of happiness, a confident smile can be seen on his face.

This kind of slightly exaggerated way of speaking and attitude is about showing off the bitter sweetness of strong courage in such a dire situation, Amami’s intention has transmitted to the hearts of the children. “Things have progress to such a stage where a few hours can result in death. The ritual will start immediately on 3rd of March, 12am... We must stop such an event from occurring.”

Amami spoke while looking at the clock hanged on the wall in the living room.

It is unclear to them the exact [time] Souma’s party will start Tensou Chifu Ritual, even Natsume, who grew up in the Tsuchimikadou family did not know about Tensou Chifu Ritual – Yakou’s reconstruction of the Imperial Onmyoudou did not record Tensou Chifu Ritual existence.

“The previous two spiritual disaster terrorism attacks... Great Hinamatsuri Purification and Hinamatsuri Repurification activated before dusk, the Omagatoki. Due to not understanding the details of Tensou Chifu Ritual, there is no way to confirm... we can only [fear] the ritual two days later will start at the same time.”

In such a dire situation, this kind of judgement may seem [complacent]. In the eyes of Natsume and her friends, the key person of the ritual, Souma Takiko, seem to be [completely prepared]. Supposing Tensou Chifu Ritual can be held anytime, Souma would had taken action already. However, Souma insist to hold the ritual on the 3rd of March, Hinamatsuri, from this, one can infer that the time of starting the ritual with the previous two spiritual disaster terrorist attacks – the chances of the magic ritual being held at the same timing is very high.

“Kyouko, you still couldn’t contact that reporter?”

“Yes... her mobile is switched off till now...”

Kyouko shook her head in response to Touji’s question.

That Onmyouji Monthly Magazine reporter that appeared to meet Kyouko for the sake of interviewing her, is a young lady by the name of Rika Wakamiya. Her elder sister used to be a lecturer in Onmyou Academy, it was said that she was the one who taught Ohtomo and Kogure. She continually questioned the cause of her elder sister’s death, after that she acted alone in investigating the mysterious magic world, specifically, the dark side of Onmyou Agency.

During the interview between Wakamiya and Kyouko, Wakamiya revealed her true intentions to Kyouko when the two of them were alone, she also left Kyouko with her name card that contains her mobile number, hoping Kyouko will contact her when anything happens. It was due to her existence that they thought of using the publisher to expose the Onmyou Agency.

After moving into this mansion yesterday, Kyouko tried to contact her multiple times, but she was not able to get through.

Judging from how serious Wakamiya is, it is hard to believe she just

left her contact without expecting anything. In addition, at this point of time where it concerns the life and death of the magic world, logically thinking, Onmyouji Monthly Magazine would not ignore communicating with the outside world. Looking from different points of view, it may be possible she had met with mishap.

“Even though we really wish she could help us, but we can’t wait any longer. It looks like we can only directly contact the editorial department of Onmyouji Monthly Magazine. However...”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just now Suisen reported to me saying the magic investigation department seems to be spying on the editorial department.”

After listening to Amami, Natsume expression turned grim.

Suisen is a shikigami lent to Touji by Kyouko’s grandmother, Kurahashi Miyo.

Even though Touji is the owner of Suisen, but this beautiful lady in kimono is mainly helping out Amami, who currently has difficulties in moving around. After moving into this base, Amami began to order Suisen to observe the editorial department of Onmyouji Monthly Magazine.

“When that Wakamiya reporter made contact with Kyouko, it was [before] the situation had escalated, because of this, it is unlikely that Wakamiya making contact is a trap laid by the Onmyou Agency. In addition, according to Suisen’s report, the people from magic investigation department did not enter the editorial department, they only observe from the outside.”

“... Could it be that they were aware of reporter Wakamiya’s existence?”

“It is difficult to say, but Wakamiya’s phone being switched off may have a connection to this situation.”

Amami answered Natsume’s question in a serious tone, “How could this be.” Kyouko wailed after listening to them at the side.

“Is it highly possible that Wakamiya-san has fallen into the hands of magic investigation department?”

“... If she had fell into the enemy’s hands, then it will be unnatural to observe the editorial department... I think. Let’s say, during the chaos these days allowed her to get hold of something, knowing this, the chief and his men began to search for her, this is the most logical explanation I can come up with currently... However, this is just my personal guess, it cannot be confirmed yet.

As the conversation moved to this point, Amami snapped his fan as if to change the conversation topic back to before.

“No matter what, there is no way for us to interfere with Wakamiya’s affairs, the most important issue right now is to contact the editorial department.”

Due to the people from magic investigation department observing outside, the contact with editorial department must proceed with extra caution. However, they are not just contacting editorial department, they have to convince them as well, if they move too cautiously, the editorial department may be suspicious of them as well.

Once again as a reminder, they do not have much time left.

“We can only hope that Onmyou Monthly Magazine editorial department lives up to our expectations and the reporters have pride in being media workers.”

What kind of judgement will the editorial department give will [depend on luck], putting everything on the line, end of the day the only way is still meeting them face to face.

“If this problem is solved, the [next] problem will be even more challenging... Touji, have u not gotten any reply yet?”

Touji facing Amami, who just turned his head and face him, gave a short answer... “Yes.”

“I am still waiting for a reply...”

Touji spoke while controlling his facial expression. However, in the eyes of Natsume, who is standing at the side, seems to be able to understand the complicated thoughts behind the plain expression Touji has. Amami targeted the member of parliament, Naota Kouzou, is actually Touji's biological father, Natsume only know of this after moving into the mansion last night. She had heard rumours about Touji being an illegitimate child, but she did not expect his father to be the politician rumoured being manipulative and an important figure in the world of politics.

-- To be revealing this now...

In the past, Touji rarely talks about his family, at most he only mentioned about his mother opening a shop in Ginza, never once he mentioned about his father.

Even though – or should say because of this, one can imagine he has difficulty in expressing his love and hate for his own father.

That said, Touji has put away his own personal feelings and is determined to seek assistance from his father. In fact, this plan of Amami will succeed or not, compared to using Onmyouji Monthly Magazine for exposure, more importantly is if Naota could make the government come up with countermeasures. Without concrete evidence and the deadline is just a short two days away, can they possibly stop the Onmyou Agency, this is what Amami has mentioned as the [greatest challenge].

“If the other side does not reply, I will head down personally, they cannot possibly ignore my existence.”

Different from the usual expressionless Touji, his eyes glow with a strong determination. As a direct student under Amami for the past one and a half years, he is fully prepared to fulfil his role.

“--- I shall leave it to you then, Touji.”

Amami, in an elderly manner, happily accept Touji's [resolve].

As if waiting for this moment of the conversation between the two, “...?” a soft vibration sound was heard, Touji quickly take out his

phone. It seems to be someone calling, he picked up the call immediately after looking at the caller display.

“... Aa, it’s me, how was it?”

He back faced his comrades, walked towards the corner of the living room and spoke softly on his phone. The cold voice carries a hint of nervousness, the tone used is somehow different compared to when speaking to Natsume and the rest, or even to his elders like Amami and Ohtomo. Natsume has never heard --- seen Touji with such an attitude.

The people in the room kept quiet, staring intently at Touji’s back. “Alright... alright...” Touji repeatedly replied in such a way. A soft female’s voice could be heard intermittently coming from Touji’s phone.

Finally, Touji replied “I got it.” And after a few seconds, he replied “Thanks.” Before ending the call.

After staring at his phone for a while, Touji let out a breath and kept his phone back into his pocket. When he turned around, he looked calm yet a little embarrassed. Natsume wondered if she had thought too deep about it.

“Is that your mother?”

“... Yes.”

Touji calmly nodded while replying to Amami’s confirmation.

“She seemed to have made contact with my dad recently and had already made an appointment with him. It will be six in the evening today at my mother’s shop, he will be coming alone.”

After listening to Touji, “Thank goodness.” Amami said cheerfully while snapping his fan.

“Now then... Let’s get prepared quickly.”

Everybody nodded to Amami’s call.



Natsume unwrapped the onigiri in her hands, took a bite on the seaweed and chewed on the cold rice.

After finishing --- It is time for battle.

For the future that she hoped for.

## Part 4

The editing department is being disorganised as usual.

The Onmyou Agency made a statement two days back about Tsuchimikado Harutora's announcement on planning a terrorist attack, there is even a magic battle broke out on the streets close to the building last evening. With regards to that magic battle, there were rumours saying it is related to the previous independent exorcist, Heavenly Sword, Kogure Zenjiro, who had just transferred to the magic investigation department. However, the Onmyou Agency did not make any statements after that and there were saying that the Onmyou Agency is filled with rumours as well.

The magic investigation department are chasing after Tsuchimikado Harutora's location, the exorcist bureau has to deal with the increasing number of spiritual disaster, on the other hand they have to prepare to stop the imminent threat of the terrorist attack.

There is not a moment to lose focus, the things that are happening in the magic world now and what will happen afterwards.

In face of such ever changing situation, Chief Editor of Onmyouji Monthly Magazine, Kobayashi, is worried with another problem... no, this cannot be considered as [another problem], it can be considered a problem part of the [unrest] and should be considered the problem [center of the unrest].

However, the scale of the problem is different from the usual work he has been doing, it is a huge problem that might shock the whole industry. Kobayashi will be starting his great adversity of age forty-two[8] this summer, he had already met with bad luck during his visit to the shrine on New Year Day, looks like the unlucky spirit that should be wiped out is lingering in his line of work.

"... Kurahashi! Are you still not able to contact Wakamiya?" He roared fiercely. "I have not." Newcomer Kurahashi quickly answered. Kobayashi cursed and looked at his laptop once more. He squints and stare at the monitor, the monitor shows the letter sent by his

subordinate Wakamiya. The contents of the mail make people wonder if she had gone insane, if it's the usual him, he will treat the contents as a bunch of nonsense without reading the entire letter, because the letter mentioned about Kurahashi Genji and his partners being the masterminds of the previous two and the upcoming terrorist attack in two days' time. This is so ridiculous and it is not part of the scope of the editorial department.

It's just...

The most frustrating thing is that the report has answered many of Kobayashi's suspicion towards the Onmyou Agency for many years.

"... Damn it."

This letter was sent by Wakamiya late last night.

According to her in the letter, she had begun working with Kogure Zenjirou since summer two years ago, investigating the secrets of the upper echelons of Onmyou Agency. Wakamiya did not trust Onmyou Agency at all, Kobayashi knows that she is investigating independently as well. Even though he did not encourage her to do this, but he was observing at the side as well, sometimes even gave suggestions without leaving traces. He hasn't been honest with her before, after working in this line for so many years, he had developed similar suspicions as her. He seriously did not expect Wakamiya would be able to get so far with her investigations alone.

Additionally, Wakamiya was at the scene of the magic battle last evening – truth to be told, it seemed like the magic battle occurred because of her.

Wakamiya began to look into the past incident where the mystical investigator, Hirata Atsune, went missing after infiltrating Twin Horn Syndicate for investigation, after searching through his network, she found out about a girl named Souma Takiko. As she was infiltrating the hotel where the girl was staying, she was attacked by the shikigami in the hotel, placed to ambush by the enemy – Kogure arrived in time and both parties immediately had a fierce battle, Wakamiya took the opportunity to escape by using the chaos created from the battle.

--- It gets to my nerves, that wild girl...

Afterwards she couldn't contact the editorial department because she lost her phone during the escape. Having no more ideas, she could only go to the manga café and use her newly registered account to send the mail. She has predicted that she will be chased down by the magic investigation department and hinted the editorial department that they might be observed by the magic investigation department, that's why she would avoid the editorial department for the time being and go underground. In fact, he replied the mail immediately, it's just there were no replies coming back after that.

This is not a joking matter.

“... Hopefully nothing happens, damn it.”

Kobayashi took out a pack of cigarette from his shirt pocket, straighten his face and stare at the monitor while his hand took out a stick of cigarette from the pack, after that he put the cigarette into his mouth before lighting it.

After blowing out the smoke that filled his lungs—

“Ah, Kobayashi chief.” A subordinate at the side called out to him. “Any news from Wakamiya?” after he consciously turned his head over, he saw the other party pointing and signalling against the cigarette on his mouth.

The editorial department has banned indoor smoking two years ago, he blankly let out a “Ah” and make a fierce looking facial expression, made an evil sounding grunt before standing from his seat.

The subordinates gave a surprising look towards at their superior who is in a foul mood as he leaves his desk and walked out of the office. Needless to say, he did not reveal the contents of Wakamiya's letter to them and he dare not say out either. This wasn't the first time Wakamiya took action alone, the others may start to suspect, not knowing why Kobayashi being so angry.

Upon entering the corridor, Kobayashi walked towards the smoking room at the corner of the building level with the cigarette in his

mouth. In this short amount of time of movement, he had met quite a few people from other departments rushing to the editorial department.

Whenever there are major happenings with regards to magic, the usual non-mainstream Onmyouji Monthly Magazine editorial department will become the main centre for reporting. However, this is not something that can be easily discussed with anyone, he even had some kind of misconception, he felt that everyone who had just walked past him were staring at him. He felt like he was hugging a bomb while being stark naked.

--- The magic investigation department is observing this place? Give me a break...

It is fortunate that there were no one else in the smoking room, he made himself comfortable in this small space, in his mind he starts to rethink about Wakamiya's report.

This rushed report has an unrefined content, it is an unsatisfactory report. It was due to the laptop containing the investigation report being left in the hotel, this report did not contain any detailed records or documents, it only simply described the most important facts.

Just relying on this letter will not bring anyone to anywhere, only Wakamiya's passion and sincerity had been delivered.

Additionally, the most important thing is...

--- Damn it, why is it such an obviously unrefined report, yet it is so **realistic**.

Kobayashi's [gut feeling] is telling him that the credibility of Wakamiya's report is very high.

It is normally extremely difficult to prove any news related to magic to be real, speaking of extreme, those magic users who resents Kurahashi Chief and the Onmyou Agency had suggested to Wakamiya, faking this report – this possibility cannot be dismissed yet. Not just manipulating people's hearts, they can also make the

other party hallucinate, or even using various kinds of shikigami. What is normally deemed impossible, it can be easily achieved just by using magic, for normal people who do not have Spirit Sight to see through the crimes magic users did, it is just impossible.

However, it is because of this, those who are related to news reports regarding magic highly trust their own [instincts]. Even though magic is something out of the world, but the magic user who is using it is still a human. Just by carefully observing human behaviour -- not just on the surface, but the deepest parts, one can understand what kind of person he or she is. This kind of judgement compared to using logic, relies more on [instincts].

Assuming Wakamiya's report is true, deciding on how to deal with the report will be even more thorny, not true, in fact, he just doesn't know what to do with it.

Kurahashi Genji is the leader of the magic world now, holding to a position that no one can ever compare, to say he is the true supreme leader of the magic world is not exaggerated as well. In such situation where one does not have any concrete evidence, accusing this kind of person of a crime is truly unrealistic.

Yet, if he wants ignore this matter, it is too serious for him to do so, it concerns many people's lives. Since he already knew of this, he cannot act as if he doesn't know anything.

"... What should I do."

Kobayashi mumbled, a desperate look and an overexerted smile comes up on his face.

He is just as concerned about Wakamiya's safety, even though considering her age has allowed accumulation of much experience, but Wakamiya is still a normal human. If she is really targeted by the people in the magic investigation department, in this kind of situation it is impossible for her to escape alone. Besides, Wakamiya got a hold of such a big scoop, she would not just quietly stay still and hide.

--- Ah ah, damn, if at least Heavenly Sword is with her, I wouldn't be

so worried.

In order to take number one priority in escaping from that spot, Wakamiya did not witness the conclusion of the magic battle last evening. However, if Kogure was on site, there were no news and attempt to make contact with Wakamiya after that, it is logical to conclude he had lost. If he had really lost, that will be a very shocking news. Kogure is a previous Independent Exorcist, he was a first class elite Onmyouji of the exorcist bureau, normally speaking, this kind of person would not lose to a shikigami.

“... As expected, that guy is being delusional... hopefully so, really...”

Without noticing, the cigarette that has not been smoked had half of it turned into ash. Kobayashi threw away the cigarette furiously and lit another cigarette.

At this moment, “Sorry for the interruption, Chief Editor Kobayashi.” A subordinate from the editorial department opened the door of the smoking room. “What is it?” he replied loudly with a hint of anger, the worries in his mind can be felt.

“There is a strange call made...”

“A strange call?”

“The caller is looking for Wakamiya.”

He immediately threw away the cigarette he just lit, rushed out of the smoking room. The subordinate was surprised, but immediately chased after him.

“Who called?”

“The caller does not wish to reveal her identity, but it is a young lady, at a very young age, might not be an adult yet. She would like to thank Wakamiya for that canned coffee... due to the special circumstances now, we are guessing if that is a voice signal used by Wakamiya.”

“Is the call still on line?”

“Of course.”

After Kobayashi returned to the editorial department, he rushed to the nearest phone and picked up the line on hold.

“--- Hello, this is Chief Editor Kobayashi.”

While he was speaking towards the speaker, he waved to signal his subordinate to leave. Understanding his intentions, his subordinate shrugged his shoulders, gave a slight bitter smile before returning to his desk. At the same time, a reply came from the other end of the call.

“Is Wakamiya-san in? May I ask for a method to contact her?”

The slightly anxious voice really sounds like a young girl.

**This means...**

“Excuse me for asking this, are you Kurahashi Kyouko?”

He specially concluded, hearing the other end let out a speechless breath. Judging from the reaction, he confirmed his own guess to be accurate. “Ah ah, please do not hang up.” Kobayashi continued quickly. “I heard about you from Wakamiya, about your father – Kurahashi Genji placing you on observation, I also know about you leaving home after the last interview. You have something to tell Wakamiya right? Something that you can finally say after escaping from being observed.”

“.....”

“Regrettably, no one knows where is Wakamiya now, there is no way to contact her, I am also worried about her well-being. If possible, could you tell me the things that you are going to tell her? It’s just... to be on the careful side, I will give you my handphone number, could you please call back later? It seems like Wakamiya is dragged into the disturbance yesterday, you understand what I mean right?”

After interviewing Kurahashi Kyouko, Wakamiya thinks highly of this young girl from a wealthy and famous family. In fact, just by hearing about her results and expectations in the Onmyou Academy, one will



already know she is a very talented and intelligent individual. Another thing, to leave her house in this situation, it is evident she has decided on going against her father – Onmyou Agency Chief's stand obviously. Even though it is unknown how much she knows, but it is highly possible her statements will be able to prove Wakamiya's report.

Of course, this could also be a [ploy] from the magic users of Kurahashi of the enemy team... Kobayashi's [instincts] is clearly telling him that he must not let this girl go. "Kurahashi-san, are you willing to accept my suggestion?"

He asked, after a few seconds quietly passed by, "Okay." The other party agreed.

Simple as it may sound, a strong determination can be heard from her voice. "Thank you." After Kobayashi told the other party his handphone number, "Please call me back as soon as possible." He repeatedly reminded the other party before ending the call.

Kurahashi Kyouko's reaction is mostly positive. The other party is still an underage, she must have muster a lot of courage before contacting the editorial department. One should not be too anxious, should not give unnecessary stress as well and should first gain the other party's trust.

--- This kind of thing I really cannot be compared to Wakamiya.

On who is better at pleasing a girl who is in her teens, Kobayashi has no way to compare himself with Wakamiya. Now is a time where he should portray himself as a reliable chief editor where other party could try to rely on, taking the lead and guide the other party. As he was thinking about this, his phone rang in a short time.

The call returned very fast. Kurahashi Kyouko is indeed excellent. If he could truly guide her, she may achieve his expectations.

--- Don't be too impatient, need to have a gentle attitude.

Kobayashi took a deep breath, firstly to let the other party to be at ease, he said...

“Hello, thank you for calling, I am chief editor Kobayashi—”

“As expected of a veteran chief of editorial department, no waste of time in explanation.”

The speaker brought out a voice vastly different from before, a voice of an aged man.

Kobayashi widened his eyes and went speechless, the other party seems to not allow him to think, continued speaking...

“I am the Chief of the Magic Investigation Division two years ago, Amami Daizen, surely you have heard of me? I apologise for making such a request suddenly, there is something I require your diligent help with. I think we should talk about this after we meet— no problems right, chief editor?”

## Part 5

Ever since autumn three years ago, he had never visited his mother's shop. At that time, he transferred school and enrolled into Onmyou Academy, returning him to Tokyo.

He visited the shop briefly, he said hello due to formalities and left immediately. Regardless if he saw his mother's face or heard his mother's voice, that was the last time, after that the two of them only kept contact via phone messaging.

Mother hates me, she surely thinks of me as a burden, Touji always had this kind of thinking.

Now he knows there was no such thing, she was purely worried about the existence of [her own child].

Cold treatment, with an attitude of detachment, he always thought that the look on his mother eyes when she looks at him is very cold. In fact, she really does not show much concern towards Touji. The person that she is most interested in is herself, furthermore, she did not even try to hide or cover up this fact. She did not care about how people around her will look at her or how people will feel about her, she only lives by her own values. In terms of this level, she can be considered as an extremely strong and straight forward person.

Even though this mother doesn't care much about her own son, but she definitely doesn't hate him, she has no evil intentions towards him as well. When he was living the most ridiculous days in his life, she did not abandon him, but she did not attempt to lead him back to the right path as well, letting him did what he wanted.

Perhaps, she herself knew that she did not behave like what people would expect of a [mother], she did not show the right interest, concern or love towards her own son. So, in contrast, she worked hard to guarantee her son's [freedom], because to her, this is the most valuable thing.

“.....”

Due to the warnings of a spiritual disaster terror attack, there were unusually less people on the streets of Ginza. The passers-by were in twos and threes, having gloomy expressions on their faces, frequently, one can see shops that were closed for business.

Touji observed the streets, using invisibility to hide his presence and arrived at his mother's shop.

He stood at the middle of the stairs and looked at the shop door located underground at the end of the stairs, looking at his watch to confirm the time. 5.50pm. His mother shifted the opening time by one hour, Touji must complete the task entrusted to him within this time.

Originally Amami would attend this discussion as well, however, he could not make it in the end due to the issue with Onmyouji Monthly Magazine progressing better than expected. He is now meeting their Chief Editor, together with Kyouko, to explain the whole situation, in hope to enlist his help, thus, Touji can only act alone on this side. Until the last moment, Amami was hesitant on which side takes priority, he believed this side is more important, but in the end, he gave in to Touji's request of wanting to settle this alone.

In his heart, he has accepted the thing about his mother, but about his father... it was not about accepting or not, because those two seems to not have any exchange at all. Other than being blood related, those two are practically [strangers].

Of course, he knew full well [what kind of person] his father is. He is the secretary-general of the largest opposition, Independent Party, rumours say that he frequently interfered and controlled politics in the past, while not making much appearance, maintaining the party operations in the background for many years.

After the New People's Party came in and stripped their political powers, he became the secretary-general, he reorganised and even rebuilt the party that was facing a crisis of disbanding. Including the political world, he has great influence in the government and financial sector as well, he is second to none most important political figure in Japan.

All these are just knowledge about [The Politician Naota Kouzou], about his personal things, Touji had no knowledge at all.

For example, he did not acknowledge about the existence of his illegitimate child, but this can be said to be a request of his mother. However, in terms of finance— perhaps his mother doesn't need it— he kept providing huge support. Their relationship was quite estranged, even though this was very coordinated with his mother's character.

However, the clearest memory he had of his father was the aura that emitted from him.

Ice cold.

And sinister.

This is the deepest impression he had of his father. Mother did not give himself much concern, father was very obviously cold. However, he did not only treat his son in such a way, that man towards anything and everything gave the same cold attitude, even towards mother his attitude is cold as well. At least this was how it looks like to Touji, in his childhood. To the Touji right now, he can roughly imagine, a father that gives him a cold attitude and his mother not giving a care at all, it's quite interesting— or should be.

Besides, he gave off an evil intending vibe that is closely similar to being [sinister]. His sharp tongue is widely known in the political arena, even though one might suspect how this kind of man managed to become a politician, but he has not just a great lot of enemies, but a great lot of comrades as well, additionally the most important thing, his political results. This man is a brilliant strategist, not just Touji, even the voters that hated him cannot deny this fact as well.

--- Oh yes, I've just remembered.

The most sinister thing that can be felt from father, is his smile.

After all, he is a politician, can freely control the smile on his face. All these smiles were purposely made like a mask. Touji from young used his instincts to see through this façade. In fact, whenever his

father smiles, Touji could feel deeply the sinister intent behind the smile.

Hiding the sinister smile like a demon, carving a trauma into the heart of a young child.

“ .....

Walking down the stairs, opening the door. As mentioned in the call, the door was not locked. The bell made a “kalakala” sound, Touji walked into the interior of the shop.

The lights of the shop were lit. Were the lights switched on first... Just as he thought about it, he realised that there was already people in the shop.

There wasn't much space in the shop. There are two tables aligned to the wall, the bar table has seven seats. A man was sitting behind the bar table, an old man with an elegant posture and wearing a high-class suit.

He can be seen on the television once in a while, but it had been so many years to meet him in person like this. At least the other party had added a few years to his age, logically he should have aged quite a bit. It's just the impression this man gave compared to the impression Touji had in his memory seems to not differ much.

The man that works behind the political arena. The VIP of this country. The most frustrating thing is, he looks so similar to himself.

At heart, he started to feel timid.

Yet, “.... Is this Touji?” the call carried a hint of... a sincere surprise, Touji thought to himself that this is the first time he had seen him being so surprised. The reaction of his father had surprised Touji as well, “Yes...” he replied simply in a soft voice.

Thinking carefully, father being so surprised is not unexpected. Oppose to Touji's view that his father had not changed, in his father's eyes, Touji is practically another person. In some sense, other than this being a reunion of father and son, it is more so their [first confrontation].

Touji closed the door of the shop, "... Long time no see." he said.

His father—Naota for a moment stared at Touji in silence. Regarding on the thoughts that went through his mind while looking at Touji, to read his mood, Touji did not have enough vision.

Then, "... Honestly, I'm very surprised." Naota silently wore a smile on his face.

The sinister intent hiding behind that smile, Touji's expression froze after seeing it.

"I didn't think you will take the initiative to contact me."

"I as well, didn't expect things would develop to this extent."

He spoke harshly yet couldn't hide his nervousness. He wiped the look on his face, walked towards to the bar counter seat that is nearest to him.

The feeling of panic already vanished from Naota, like a cold hard mirror, he looked at Touji with a smile.

Then he slowly continued.

"I knew you dropped out of Onmyou Academy, I also knew you disappeared after that, but I do not know of the details. If you want money you can look for your mother, I am really interested, I cannot imagine why will you look for me."

"....."

The other party spoke straight to the point, Touji can't help but pursed his lips.

Not talking about his enrollment into Onmyou Academy and talked about this issue, he didn't expect the other party would know the things that happened afterwards. It should be mother that told him, or was it that he investigated on his own? Touji was possibly suppressing his feelings of disturbance.

There was no arrogance in Naota's attitude, or any portray of a

father's strict attitude, it was also not of a father wanting to be likable to his son, his attitude is very clear. Without mistake, this was how this man always been, regarding father, he once again confirmed this thinking. Two of them sitting down to have a conversation, this could be said to be the first time.

On the other hand, Naota was being direct, beyond the expected sincere attitude Touji was expecting and this made him surprised.

That kind of attitude was not suited for a veteran politician, Touji was not so naïve to assume this to be his true self, or it was a result of the other party being neglectful. He was purposely removing the use of negotiation, displaying a straight forward attitude. To be truthful, in fact this [portray of attitude was for the sake of the other party].

Needless to say, to directly negotiate with people like Naota is normally impossible, especially when during communication, the removal of excessive calculations and socialising methods, a person with a stand like him would not do that as well. Speaking on purpose coldly and with sincerity, can be viewed as [being lenient] towards his son, of course to see his true intentions was extremely difficult, but...

--- It doesn't matter.

"I would like to negotiate with you."

Touji too, spoke straight forwardly to the other party, pushing the readied documents across the bar counter.

"It does not contain any spells, just ordinary papers, take a look."

He spoke while remaining possibly calm, Naota shifted his sight downwards after listening, towards the cover of the document. He boldly accepted the document, taking out his glasses from the inner pocket of his suit, then started reading the document silently. Touji sat on the bar stool beside the bar counter and observed askance at Naota.

Even though it was described as a document, but the amount wasn't



much, it only had six A4 pieces of paper. The main contents of the report were explaining about the current Chief of Onmyou Agency, Kurahashi Genji's crimes, including Satake Masumi of the New People's Party who has close ties with him and how he was related to the entire conspiracy. Naota steadily, spent about two to three minutes to finish reading the entire document. It was impressive, the contents of the document would let anyone that read it to be shocked, but he managed to maintain a poker face while reading through the whole content.

After finishing, Naota took off his glasses and placed the document back on to the bar table. His voice remained very calm. "I heard this is the same as that time when you decided to become an Onmyouji..." "What do you mean?" "You are really unpredictable, you have indeed inherited her blood." "....." Seeing the other party suddenly portray himself as a father, Touji reactively felt frustrated, but this was not the time to be angry.

"... It was written in the document, the forewarned spiritual disaster terrorist attack that will happen on the 3rd of March, which is in two days' time, the actual mastermind is Kurahashi Chief and his men. There is no time, if this is not dealt with immediately, there will be grave repercussions, moreover, the damage will be way beyond the previous two spiritual disaster terrorist attacks."

So, to say... Speaking to this point, Touji paused momentarily, he decisively turned his body towards Naota, with a determined look in his eyes, he looked straight at the other party.

"... I hope you will as well, help in stopping the spiritual disaster terrorist attack this time."

Naota bore Touji's sight straight on, the smile on his face disappeared.

"You mentioned about negotiation, what can I gain from this?"

"This information itself is your gain, Satake of the New People's Party is related to this, not only that, Satake is the main figure of the young politicians of the New People's Party right now. This not only affects Satake, to the New People's Party as a whole, it is a lethal scandal."

Naota is the Secretary General of Independent Party, for many years they are the number one party that leads the country, now that the Independent Party has fallen to become an opposition, it is their wish to get back into power. A scandal powerful enough to shake the current ruling party itself, he could not sit back and ignore it.

“It is as you said.”

Naota looked at the document on the bar table, and calmly nodded once.

“Of my long career in politics, this is the most heavyweight explosive I’ve encountered, I can’t imagine a member of parliament of the ruling party would have a hand in a terrorist attack.”

After speaking in a harsh like tone, Naota once again look at Touji, “But, provided what is written on it is true.” He added this proviso.

“There is no explanation in the papers, and to use this method of contacting me directly, from what I see is that you do not have any means of proving it.”

“... The previous magic investigation department chief can provide a statement.”

“Totally unconvincing, that chief knows that his statement could not convince anyone, that’s why he did not come personally, and decided to make you come here isn’t it?”

“That is because---”

“Any investigation related to magic must have all evidence gathered, any action taken must be extra cautious. You should know something of this level? You don’t even have evidence, this can’t be even considered as [useful] information. Besides, the spiritual disaster terrorist attack is said to be in two days’ time, this is really not a time to be negotiating.”

Naota coldly judged, once again a sinister smile appeared on his lips.

--- Calm down.

Touji restrained himself, he knew beforehand that Naota would attack him about the lack of evidence, he also knows the current situation is very challenging to his group. To the parties concerned like Touji, or to those people who are suspicious of the things happening in the magic world and the Onmyou Agency these few years, they will likely be convinced. To a third party that is not related with the situation where they have no prior information and there is no evidence, to have them believe the crimes Kurahashi and his men committed is just impossible.

It is precisely because of this, Touji and his group need to rope in Naota.

“Evidence wise, it can be found as long as we look for it. The chief and his men definitely do not have absolute control over Onmyou Agency, not to mention spending so much time in such a large-scale crime, logically speaking, there is no way that they did not leave any evidence behind. Even if one is not a Onmouji, as long as people from outside carry out appropriate investigation, evidence can definitely be found.”

“That comment is just your personal expectation, besides, just with these few pieces of paper, how can you expect the government to carry out investigation.”

“This is why I request for your help, even though you are a member of parliament of the opposition, there are no problems if you want the police to take action right?”

“Really can’t stand the shallow thinking of outsiders, even if is Cabinet Members, if the conditions are not met, no one can randomly order any on site action.”

Facing Touji who was trying his best to persuade him, Naota kept his cool, replied with a smile.

“Not to mention Onmyou Agency is a special place, to anyone that is not an Onmyouji, that place is a true pandemonium. If we do not have evidence, or have the situation of the society as a backing, it is very hard to take any action against them.”

Naota's smile revealed his wicked intention. It is an illusion. Touji stared at the other party, not willing to let him go.

"We are currently working hard in looking for backing from the public opinion, it is mentioned in the document, Amami chief is currently meeting with the chief editor of Onmyouji Monthly Magazine. You should know about Onmyou Monthly Magazine, right? After we are done with preparation, we will expose using the internet, when that happens, no doubt the Onmyou Agency will receive a huge blow. If an investigation is to be carried out, that will be the best time to do so."

The situation was as described by Amami, for Touji and his group to turn the tide from the current adversity, they can only use reckless methods to mess up the current situation, and to use this method to achieve an [advantage]. For the sake of breaking up the detailed preparations the enemy had done, they can only counter attack with one vigorous blow.

"Do you truly believe this level of struggle will change the situation? Even if the situation really changed, time itself is still undeniably insufficient."

These words from Naota were very logical. Without anyone reminding him, he knows this is a disadvantageous gamble.

"But time should be sufficient enough for you to take action."

"The situation is still the same. I cannot possibly under the condition of not having any evidence, solely relying on this report and take action... besides do you believe you can convince me to take action under such a condition? What reasons do you have, to think I will unconditionally accept this report?"

"Because---"

"Because I am you father?"

"Ka-da", Touji pushed away the bar stool and stood up, Naota's sinister intent seem to be dripping from the edge of his smile.

Anger surged as a reaction caused him to momentarily unable to

control his emotions. However, it was not because of Naota's words that made him reach his limit of patience, more importantly, it was his heart that wants to run away badly was known clearly by the other party.

He made a request to Amami to let him handle this himself, is it because he had confidence to [convince] his father? To use only one document and convince the politician Naota Kouzou, did he really have confidence? He did not actually have confidence, he was anticipating for Naota to [believe] him—believe in his own son?

His son, stubbornly maintain a distance for so many years and now lowering his head to ask for his help, he could have assumed by doing this, his father— Naota would have agreed to help him?

--- How stupid.

Naota Kouzou is not a man that is easy to deal with, looking at his past records, one will know he is not an opponent that can be convinced using such perfunctory thinking. Nevertheless, did he seriously face this obvious reality?

“ ... ”

He clenched his teeth.

Please [believe] me--- if this sentence could be spoken, he wondered how relaxed he could be. However, he stopped himself from speaking those words, speaking that sentence would mean wanting Naota to agree to this on behalf of their father and son relationship. Pride is no matter, but Naota will definitely not forgive such a lucky attitude. This kind of attitude, would mean Touji did not have the value of fighting alongside with Naota.

To agree to this meeting, was already the biggest concession he could give. To flexibly utilise this hard to come by chance, Touji can only rely on his own effort.

“... I can't blame you for not believing the contents of the document... what is written on it seems to be unbelievable, you don't want to accept it is also reasonable.” Touji used his entire body's

strength to control his tone, spoke continuously. He then rests his hand on the bar table, “however.” He turned his body towards Naota.

“Even if you do not [accept]... there is no way for you to [ignore] right? If the things I had told you were true, it will result in an irreversible spiritual disaster...!”

“... Listen carefully, the Onmyou Agency is currently spending all their efforts in [preventing terrorist attack], to investigate them right now is as good as hindering their actions.”

“The document has mentioned about that being their trick, right? Or what are you trying to say? Are you implying that this negotiation is a trap set by [terrorist Tsuchimikado Harutora]? Or is it you are assuming that I wanted to gain your attention, to the point that I used the currently missing previous magic investigation department chief and the editorial department of Onmyouji Monthly Magazine, to make up a big lie?”

“.....”

For once, Naota stopped his continuous refuting. Touji views it as a very good reaction, clenched his fist.

Naota is a person that works with [logic].

Besides, he mentioned it before, he cannot imagine what kind of [important matters] Touji had such that he had to see his father.

Touji had no reason to lie, the only possibility is hoping to destroy his father’s arrogance. However, if this is true, it is impossible that Amami and the chief editor of Onmyouji Monthly Magazine to lend a hand. Besides, if the investigation of the Onmyou Agency really takes place, it does not benefit Touji’s group at all. In other words, at least this can be seen as Touji and his comrades believed the contents of the document to be accurate, and is an evidence of their determination to stop the other party from taking action.

On the other hand, it could be that Touji’s group were being lied to, but assuming the terrorist tried to use Touji’s group to restrict the movements of Onmyou Agency, this kind of method is far too

**inefficient**, even [illogical].

What Touji's group is trying to accomplish is [extremely difficult], will the terrorist specially prepare such a trap that is [difficult to succeed]? Moreover, instead of lying to Naota and make him pressure Onmyou Agency, using such a roundabout method, logically speaking there are better ways of doing this. The irony of this is that, it is exactly this plan of Touji's group having a very low chance of success, the chances of this being part of the terrorist plan is very low as well.

Looking from an optimistic perspective, this might be a plan that was made from being delusional. There is no evidence, and insufficient time to react, even more so there is no reason for Naota to act.

However—

At least the action Touji's group took—in regards to the [important matters] that Touji seek Naota for, assuming the contents of the document are judged to be rightfully [logical].

“... I will say this again, the mastermind behind the spiritual disaster terror attack is Kurahashi Genji and his men, this is **absolutely accurate**. It doesn't matter if you believe it or not, however...”

Touji looked directly into Naota's eyes, allowing his determination to flow into his sight.

“The things I have mentioned—the dangers of this matter, you cannot simply [ignore].”

Naota fearlessly took on Touji's sight, after that, a smile appeared on his lips, using an unusually cold tone and replied...

“Why? I personally would think that pretending to not know this is a much clever choice.”

“You are asking why?” Touji laughed loudly. “Because you are a **politician**, because you are a person that [sacrificed many things in life], **a man that is living in this world as a politician**. When a terrorist attack happens, the chance of causing the lives of the citizens to be lost, even if the chance of this happening is less than

one percent, you are not able to simply **ignore**.”

Touji brought out the vigour that is cornering the other party, firmly made this declaration.

Naota's smile disappeared, his eyes widened slightly.

He shifted his line of sight slowly, “... What a way.” He muttered. At this moment, Naota's expression changed to the one of happiness for a brief moment— Touji was thinking if he was mistaken.

The heavy atmosphere in the shop was lifted, Naota then slowly and carefully stood up from the bar stool, said to the highly alerted Touji...

“As expected, discussing this matter **with you** is meaningless.” Touji felt like his body was pinned to a heavy rock.

He immediately thought of continuing to speak, but he could not find the right words to make Naota stay. For the remaining methods, he could only think of using brute force to make the other party bow down, and no doubt this action is as good as declaring he had lost.

Please—this word came up to his throat, the faces of his friends flashed through his mind, the urge to plea for Naota's help raged in his heart.

However, he couldn't do it. The calm side of himself desperately stopped the side of himself that wants to rely on the word [please], this word not only will make Naota disappointed, it will not make him change his mind as well. He is not a person that will be swayed by this kind of words, this is not that kind of situation, and they are not discussing about that kind of matters as well, that's why Touji could only watch blankly at Naota stand up and tidy the lower part of his suit.

Yet—

“... I will observe what happens after the exposition before I do anything.”

Touji's body shivered at these very words of Naota.



He nearly shouted... “Father!” Right before he shouted, he quickly swallowed those words. After that, he observed the side view of his father.

Did Naota decide to take action or not, it cannot be seen from his expression. Looking at his father, he cannot help but have a glimmer of hope.

However, isn't it that this kind of words meant that at least the scenario where by negotiation had broken down has been avoided? The situation now is still not hopeless, even though the conclusion is still unknown... Suddenly, “... I can't stand this... it's been a while since I've encounter such [height of a case] ...” Naota used an unusually relaxed tone and muttered. Touji did not hear clearly, “What?” and looked towards his father. These words from Naota is just a mutter to himself, he did not have intention of letting Touji hear it. From the start, he did not felt Touji's frustration, after he turned his head reluctantly, he immediately regained his usual coldness. Then, without speaking anymore, he walked towards the exit of the shop.

He placed his hand on the door knob, and opened the door.

Touji stared at Naota's back, whether he performed satisfactory or not in this round, the man that holds the answer did not even look towards Touji.

Naota left the shop without turning back.

In Touji's eyes, just like this, the back of his father disappeared into the exit, the door closed soundlessly.

## Part 6

When the report concluded, it was already nightfall outside the window, the streetlights of Akihabara were lit.

What concluded was the scheduled report he made to Kurahashi. Ever since entering magic investigation department, even though the amount was determined by the period, yet he continually made reports to Kurahashi without fail. He was not reporting to the magic investigation department chief as a mystical investigator, but as his personal identity. This is a request by Kurahashi, it is also what he himself hoped for—a recognition for being a talented individual. He had this confidence, and did not find this thinking to be of any wrong.

However—

“Aiya, ended already? It’s so early today.”

The tone of his co-worker sounds particularly sarcastic, or could it be that he had thought too deeply into it? Upon returning to the office, Yamashiro Hayato looked at Miyoshi Tougo silently.

As usual, people are coming in and out of the magic investigation department, not just the members of Onmyou Agency, there were many from the metropolitan police board and other departments, one can also see exorcists around as well. Mystical investigators were all reeking of murderous intent, being combat ready had slowly become an everyday thing. However, this situation is bound to worsen in near future, because the day of the terrorist attack had been teased to be in two days. Yet, both Yamashiro and Miyoshi were completely excluded from this unrest of Onmyou Agency.

In this noisy and disorganised corner of this building floor, that has become a fixed location for the both of them did not even have an office desk, just using a waist high drawer to partition this small resting area. Miyoshi was sitting on a chair and reading a book as usual, he does not raise his head when replying Yamashiro. Yamashiro on the other hand had nothing to do, he stood there

blankly in front of him.

--- What a weird feeling...

The other side of the drawer is in a difficult situation, it is only his own surroundings that is in peace, in his eyes, the hurried pace and the disorganised surrounding completely looks like an unreal mirage to him. "How was it? Are there new orders?"

"... No, just telling us to wait for orders, take precaution against any emergencies from happening."

"Any news regarding Kogure?"

"I heard he is still missing."

"....."

Listening to Yamashiro's reply, Miyoshi stood silent momentarily. The expression he had as he stared at his book is the same as usual, it is unknown what kind of thoughts he was having.

Then, "... If that's the case..." he only said this before flipping to the next page of his book.

He is a man that follow his own way to the point of extreme, however, Yamashiro based on his own past experiences, observed that Miyoshi's sight was not chasing after the words on the book. A faint and unfocused sight slipped off the surface of the paper, an action he does whenever he ponder about something.

"How about your side? Did the spirit pulse in the metropolitan area show signs of disturbance?"

"... Some spiritual disasters occurred after sunset. There were quite a lot of spiritual disasters last night, following the frequency, the amount of spiritual disasters will be possibly higher than last night."  
"What about magic battles?"

"Nothing so far."

Miyoshi replied plainly, and Yamashiro nodded accordingly.

Actually, there wasn't a need to ask on purpose to confirm, if a magic battle breaks out—they will be able to sense the large-scale magic battle from afar, Miyoshi will take initiative to mention it as well. After the incident with Kogure last evening, there was not any movement that were worth taking note.

However, those that did not come into attention were at most [movements on the surface], considering from the current situation, beneath the surface is surely raging like a storm, the only exception is the people like Yamashiro that were stuck in this place. If their leader Kogure is here now, it will be hard to know what kind of mission these few people, including himself, will be tasked to carry out.

--- If Kogure is here...

Yamashiro placed both his hands into the pockets of his long pants, once again crossing over the drawer and observe the situation in the department.

The co-workers that are running in the flood, the current that is pushing them is also the [main current] from the organisation, Yamashiro is also one of them that grows in that current, yet he is currently being casted outside of the main current, watching that current from the side lines, a never felt before strange feeling surged from the bottom of his heart.

Yamashiro is a disciple of the Kurahashi family.

He was born into a family that served the Kurahashi family for generations, after confirming that he had the talent of Spirit Sight, he naturally became a disciple, and began to train in magic since young.

Yamashiro was highly gifted, not only he performed better than his peers, he even outperforms the seniors, Kurahashi who noticed his talents occasionally trains with him personally as well. Even though this caused the people around to envy and frustrated, but the training with Kurahashi is sufficient to make up the various shortcomings. What he gained were not just the experience as a magic user, there were other things as well.

When he enrolled into Onmyou Academy at the age of 15, Yamashiro

already had the abilities comparable to a professional Onmyouji. In fact, he gotten the qualification of [Second-Class Onmyou] before entering his third grade, additionally, he took a leave of absence from Onmyou Academy before graduation.

After that, under Kurahashi's arrangement, he became a Onmyouji under his direct command, and continually gain experience in his line of work. During actual battle, his performance is even more outstanding. After leaving Onmyou Academy for two years, he passed the [First-class Onmyou] exam at the age of 19, becoming National First-Class Onmyouji.

Looking back, how he lived in the past was like walking amidst a flood. However, he did not have any worries, to be precise, he did not have the energy to spare for worries. For the sake of not being swallowed by the flood, he always gave his all.

In order to avoid being swallowed by the flood, the only way is to be a part of the flood. With the same speed, same direction, immersing himself and swim forward. This is the method he used to survive, compared to every other people, it is more flexible and more efficient.

Becoming a professional Onmyouji, becoming one of [Twelve Divine Generals], in addition making a goal to reach higher status, he did not once question his own heart about his ambition.

However.

--- Tsk.

Yamashiro's heart made a teensy— soft— crack. Like how he is standing outside of the flood, this is the first time Yamashiro realised he did not know [where] this current that he was part of is flowing towards.

Where exactly this flood which powers his life heads to.

The meaning of focusing on this [job].

“... Beside...”

“What?”

“Can I sit beside you?”

“.....”

Miyoshi lifted his head from his book, gazed at Yamashiro's face. Comparatively, Yamashiro was expressionless, just silently looking at Miyoshi.

After observing Yamashiro's looks for some time, “Please sit.” Miyoshi finally agreed. Yamashiro said thanks in a low voice, and sat on the chair beside Miyoshi. He leaned his back on the back of the chair, lifted his legs, and let his vision blankly stared forward.

This is the first time he was being lazy during working hours. If this is the usual him, he would not imagine of such thing. Especially when facing such an unprecedented large-scale situation, yet he is here wasting his life away, if it was the him in the past, he would not be able to tolerate it for even a minute. Despite so, the current him have half accepted this idle situation, the next course of action, the conviction and the direction on the way to do things, he has lost them all.

If Kogure is here now...

“.....”

Former Special Spirit Sensor Miyoshi realised Kogure had participated in the magic battle that broke out last evening, after the magic battle ended, Yamashiro reported this to Kurahashi.

Kurahashi who received the report, restricted the two of them from telling others about Kogure, in addition, he made them continue to stay in Magic Investigation Department on standby, at the same time he ordered Miyoshi to observe if the aura in the metropolitan area has any disturbance.

At that time, Yamashiro made a rare enquiry to Kurahashi on the meaning behind the orders, asked him why he did not reveal to the public the things Kogure did, Yamashiro believed that this is at least an information that can be grasped by the Magic Investigation

Department.

However, Kurahashi's attitude was very cold, he only expressed that under circumstances when details were not clear, to make an official statement now will bring forth unnecessary confusion, and rejected Yamashiro's suggestion.

It wasn't that he did not understand Kurahashi's intention, it's just Yamashiro and his group were not allowed to discuss this matter, yet there were no orders of restricting the people on site from talking about this, and allowed them to make wild guesses. Such a large-scale magic battle, and it happened at a location just 20 minutes walking distance away from the building, to hide the traces of Kogure's participation is near impossible, in the end, not just the Magic Investigation Department, the whole Agency were filled with speculations and rumours.

Kurahashi's methods were not thorough enough, and it is not like him to do such a thing, the whole thing looks like **chaos created on purpose**. However, the thing that Yamashiro could not accept is that, Kogure went missing, yet Kurahashi did not come up with any counter measures.

The existence of the Former Independent Exorcist Kogure is extremely important, in some cases, just himself alone turning up will overturn the situation. Did he die? Did he betray us? Or is it he had some plans and had to hide underground for the time being? Even though unknown, but this is not a problem that can be skipped for a reason like [details were not clear].

Moreover, Kurahashi did not take appropriate actions with regards to this matter. It might be just Yamashiro did not see? In fact, Kurahashi **already had** information regarding Kogure.

“.....”

Yamashiro unconsciously narrowed his eyes.

About the magic battle last evening, Yamashiro [saw] something else, the one that was fighting against Kogure was one of the two shikigami that was [fighting against Tsuchimikado Harutora] few

days ago at Ogikubo. That shikigami hindered him [for the sake of Onmyou Agency], and started a battle with Kogure.

After which, Yamashiro **did not report to Kurahashi** about this.

Yamashiro also did not know how to explain the reason why he did not report it, it just during that time when he was making the report to Kurahashi, the words Miyoshi told him earlier rested in his heart.

--- [Regarding this [profession] called Onmyouji, we will have to think deeper about it.]

For the sake to avoid being swallowed, placing oneself as part of the flood, immersed in swimming forward until now. He took pride in being an excellent Onmyouji, and felt confident.

Yet now, the words of his co-worker that only has desirable ability had stabbed deeply into his heart, without knowing, he started to pursue after the back of his leader that disappeared without authorisation, and even hiding things from the person he cannot overemphasise as his master, Kurahashi.

--- Damn it...

Thinking quickly, Yamashiro urged himself in his heart. As if chanting first grade spirit language, he ordered himself in a determined and strict manner.

Thinking about his past experiences, as well as the things that he did with prejudiced views and without suspicions.

He once again looked back to the past, using his mind to think.

“... Miyoshi-san.”

“... What is it?”

“Kogure-san is he... still alive?”

“About this...”

Miyoshi continued reading his book, calmly avoiding from giving a



certain reply, and Yamashiro did not expect to get any beneficial answer from this.

Yet—

The next second, Miyoshi suddenly closed his book, Yamashiro reactively shifted his vision over.

Miyoshi maintained his posture after closing his book, observed the nothingness in front of him. Seeing that kind of look he had, Yamashiro slightly straightened his sitting posture. That is not the kind of attention that he gave when he was thinking just now, even though similar, but his eyes were focused on the air, his mind is highly concentrated. This is how Miyoshi look whenever he [see] aura.

Heartbeat increased.

“... Yamashiro, what time is it now?”

“It’s 7.57pm.”

“It’s already so late, do you want to join me for dinner?”

“... Okay, I’m hungry as well.”

After Yamashiro replied, Miyoshi stood up immediately, Yamashiro followed and stood up. The two of them did not continue conversing, their eyes did not even meet as well, and made their way out of the Magic Investigation Department office.

Groups of mystical investigators were walking quickly, or they are running to rendezvous at the corridor. Yamashiro and Miyoshi were dodging these co-workers of theirs and at the same time making their way to the lift. They took the lift together with the Agency members, towards ground floor. Next, they moved towards the main gate of the lobby, leaving through the main gate of the building. The two of them did not spoke a single word this whole time, they do not look nervous, and did not have any unnatural attitude.

After the two of them walked over to the opposite side of the roundabout that was connected to the road front of the agency.

“Which [direction] are we heading?”

“Pardon me, before we continue--”

“Those guys behind us?”

“You noticed?”

“I am also a Mystical Investigator you know.”

The two of them walked side by side, conversing in a low voice, maintaining a certain walking speed while conversing. In the eyes of passers-by, it would seem as they are discussing what to have for dinner.

Miyoshi's voice and expression were the same as usual.

“Were they ordered by the chief?”

“It seems so.”

“We are really not trusted. Forget about me, surprisingly, you as well.”

“Let me clear up one thing, this must be caused by you and Kogure-san.”

“Should we shake them off?... But if we let them think they have lost us would be a problem as well. What to do?”

“Let's camouflage... no, there is no need for such a flashy move, let's use spirit language to signal.”

“Can you do it?”

“How could I possibly fail, give me three minutes.”

“Then I shall leave it to you.”

Shortly after, Yamashiro used a simple method and created a substitute of himself, at the same time made himself invisible and moved, he made a round through the alley to the back.

Following him from the building— Strictly speaking, it was from yesterday after making the report, these two Onmyouji that he knew began following him. They are disciples of the Kurahashi family, they belong to the Magic Investigation Department, they are strong but not cautious enough. He closed in on them without a trace, and went invisible together with the surroundings. Next, he chanted incantations on the two of them when they were surprised and turned their heads back, and attacked them with Unmoving Golden Chains. Both of them failed to resist, and lost consciousness after being hit by the magic.

“Too careless.”

This is the consequence of being careless—in fact, they received orders to observe Yamashiro’s group, yet they did not treat this mission with sufficient importance. It might be Kurahashi simply made this order [for the sake of insurance], it is unknown if he belittled Yamashiro’s team due to Kogure’s absence, or the opposite, a show of trust towards them. A disturbance surged deep in the heart, Yamashiro tossed these thoughts away, allowing his mind to clear.

He knelt down beside the two unconscious men, “**Listen to me.**” Using first grade spirit language to signal them. The signal he made allowed the two of them to be unaware of the coming gap period, he then ordered them to wait for further instructions at an inconspicuous location, he then returned to Miyoshi’s side.

“All done.” He said in a collected manner.

“Impressive. Let’s walk in this direction.”

Miyoshi nodded in the direction of Yamashiro, sped up his walking speed. Yamashiro increased his guard against his surroundings while following behind him.

Miyoshi walked in the direction opposite of JR Akihabara station, after walking for some time, Yamashiro widened his eyes in surprise, he had noticed the aura that Miyoshi [sees].

“This is! —Miyoshi-san!”

“Yes, but, just shikigami is just... moreover, the one that its travelling with seems like a normal person. It might be an [assignment] forcefully bestowed upon us.”

Compared to the agitated Yamashiro, Miyoshi remained calm, sighed in helplessness. He pretended to be calm on the surface, his soles stepped loudly on the asphalt road and slightly increased his speed.

The road ahead.

A large motorcycle that stopped at the side of the road, and a woman that is standing at the side of the road appear before their eyes.

That woman looks to be in her twenties, after noticing Yamashiro's group walking towards her, she let out a surprised “ah”, and her expression changed.

Judging from her reaction, it seems like she knew who the two of them are, however, Yamashiro did not know who is this woman, he glanced sideways and noticed that Miyoshi seems to not know who this woman is as well.

As a mystical investigator, Yamashiro did not appear in the media, in other words, this woman recognises Miyoshi. Even though being a [Twelve Divine Generals], Miyoshi was in charge as a non-mainstream Former Special Spirit Sensor, to recognise his [face], such a person must be from this industry.

Who in the world is she? However, the thing that caught his attention wasn't that woman, in fact it was the motorcycle that stopped by the road, to be precise, it was the aura on the top of her head.

--- Certainly, without mistake!

The woman that observed the two of them walking towards her had a frozen expression, but does not seem like she wanted to run away, just silently waiting for them to approach.

The next moment, the aura Yamashiro [saw] on the top of the woman's head took on a physical form.

“Garr! Tougo! Hayato! It's good that you guys could make it here!

Glad that you came!”

The black Tengu shikigami of Kogure moved to tears, wildly flapping its small wings.

Heartbeat increased rapidly.

Yamashiro, who is being casted away from the main stream had a strong feeling. A feeling that he will be thrown into a new flood this very moment.



Upon hearing the spiritual disaster in Okubo had been successfully exorcised, he was relieved.

After being an exorcist for a year, he is getting used to handle the increasing amount of spiritual disaster, but ever since the terrorist attack being forewarned last week, he had been struggling to cope. For the sake of exorcising the Level 4 spiritual disaster in Ogikubo, the team he belongs to, the Shinjuku branch, is so busy to the point where everyone is in a pitiful state. What kind of condition Tokyo is in right now, this kind of ignorant insecurity turned into fear, corroding the heart.

However, when tomorrow comes, things will start improving, because the important figure of the Shinjuku Branch, Independent Exorcist Shigeoka, will return to his post tomorrow. To test and adjust the new model mechanical-type shikigami, Shigeoka remained at the research and development department in Hachioji for the entire day, these new model mechanical-type shikigami were said to be moved here tomorrow as well.

With Shigeoka not around, it affects the Shinjuku branch not just on the amount of work, but also their mentality. Just having the fact of having a [Twelve Divine Generals] on standby at the side, is enough to excite the exorcists that are battling onsite. Precisely because of this, he is hoping more that tonight will be without incident.

The team he is with was originally going to move out, but they were later ordered to return to standby condition, to be able to breathe the outside fresh air, he notified his senior and made his way to the rooftop of the building.

The time now is midnight after 12am, the tinges of winter is getting thinner, but at this timing it is still freezing cold like winter. The strong and cold wind on the rooftop penetrates one's bones, he had a little regret the moment he steps outside, but it was also the cold wind that blew away his sleepiness. He lets out a milky white breath of air, and walked towards the railing, surveying the night view of Shinjuku in front of him.

It was at this moment, aura in all directions showed disturbance at the same time. As if the whole world appears to 'lag', noises filled up the surroundings, and then disappeared along with the aura. He stood rooted to the ground, for a moment he did not figure out what is going on, until the alarm near the building started to ring, he then realised in shock the things that just happened.

The permanent barrier that encapsulates the whole Shinjuku Branch vanished, and as if using magic to make a human vanish instantly, the method used to eradicate the barrier is very fascinating. His heart beat rapidly. Anxious shouts of exorcists in the building echoed below his feet.

An emergency occurred, I must quickly head back. He rushed towards the door at the rooftop—

He suddenly stopped in his tracks.

He felt something flew over his head, there is no sound and no one can be seen... Wrong, something is there. There is a dark outline that is merged with the darkness.

A bird.

It is a crow.

A huge crow flying around the sky, drenched in thin and pure fluorescent powder, landed on the railings of the roof. Next, he saw

the crow had three legs.

Then, the crow jumped off the railing lightly— Following on, he did not look away, he did not even blink at all, without knowing, the crow transformed into a human dressed in black.

It all happened so suddenly that his mind could not process the things happening in front of him. As he stood rooted to the ground, the man in black greatly waved his coat.

A man—to be precise, a young man, however, that exceeding imposing manner gives off an indescribable boldness, moreover, his left eye is covered with an eye patch made of silk. No matter that face or the features of that appearance, it matches exactly as the wanted list.

Next, the aura beside him swayed, a shikigami appeared. A huge man in western clothing, but did not had a tie, with a height of near two metres. Compared to the master that merges with the darkness, the shikigami had gorgeous looking golden hair. The muscular body makes people think of the heroes in legends. However, the left sleeve of that man is empty. As the wind blows on the roof, that left sleeve and the master's coat swayed in union with the wind.

A one-eyed young man in black.

A one-armed huge man following the young man.

Of course, this is the first time he sees them with his own eyes. However, he knew them very well. They are the enemies of the Onmyou Agency, Tsuchimikadou Harutora and his shikigami Kakugyouki, they are the ones that were mentioned to be pulling off a terrorist attack tomorrow.

“--- Excuse my intrusion.”

After the young man finish speaking, he quickly raised his magic power. The aura that burst out flooded the whole roof, the man behind revealed his fangs as he makes a ferocious smile. The barrier that was hastily made was pressured by the spiritual pressure of the young man and the shikigami, causing severe ‘lag’ to appear. Next, as

if ripples lifting the 'lag' on the other end, the one-eyed sharp gaze penetrated straight through his body.

The young man, back facing the shining night view of Shinjuku, casted a shadow of his figure, proudly notified...

“Sorry, I will not show any mercy from now on.”





# **Chapter 2 - Rising Waves of Wind**

# Part 1

The way of Onmyou must not be discontinued.

The true way of Onmyou.

These are the last words left behind by father.

As the eldest son of the Kurahashi family, father left the world without becoming the Head of the family. After the end of war, when the relationship between the Kurahashi and the military was questioned for accountability, nearly losing their power, the person who saved the family from the crisis was mother, Kurahashi Miyo.

Of course, it wasn't that Father did not contribute anything. Day and night, he was extremely busy continually supporting Mother — not just the head of Kurahashi family, but also as an important [Star Reading Technique User] that the financial sector heavily relied on, and committed to developing and educating the next generation by giving her all as Head of Onmyou Academy, a wife that had exceptional performance in all aspects. To allow mother, who was just a foster daughter, to become the head of the Kurahashi family. It wasn't anyone else that made this exceptional decision; it was father himself. For the sake of the continued survival of the Kurahashi family at that time, he felt that mother was the better candidate for the position as Head of the family. He convinced the family on this matter, successfully paving the way for the Kurahashi family towards the peak of the magic world.

Mother does make truly noble contributions, but father had greater contributions.

Yet, before father died, the last words he spoke to him after specially sending away his wife were unexpected.

As the most trusted [Kurahashi family] of the Onmyoudou traditional household, the Tsuchimikado family, they must never forget about the [Yin] domain of the Onmyoudou.

After the war, the many [Onmyouji] that conspired with the military were severely criticised by the public. To handle the continual occurrences of spiritual disasters, they received permission to continue existing in the society, but their position was extremely restricted. For the sake of changing the public's impression, there was a need to push the [Yang] of Onmyou to the center of the stage. Despite knowing that doing this would cause Onmyou to lose balance, for the sake of not allowing the way of Onmyou to be discontinued, they did not have other choice.

However, the way of Onmyou did not solely consist of [Yang]; especially as the branch family, [Kurahashi family], they are not allowed to forget about the [Yin] side.

Father, whose life was in danger, laid on the bed and held his son's hand, spoke of his views. The things he heard from his father, about his grandfather and his brothers, about the golden age — under the lead of the genius ancestor Tsuchimikado Yakou, mobilising the Kurahashi family for the sake of reviving magic, the age where they happily jumped and moved forward, and about the passion towards magic the people of the Kurahashi held at that time.

Regardless of [Yin] or [Yang], good or evil, using bold, unrestricted, intense, and diverse methods to unlock the mysteries of magic, after rebuilding and redeveloping, even the world of gods — from the ancient times till now, a sanctuary that not a single magic user reached had also been revealed. If the ideal could be achieved, what will the world look like then? In what direction will it move forward?

Regrettably, this was where father bit his lips.

Tsuchimikado Yakou only had one step left before reaching the ideal, which in the end he did not achieve as well. However, his ideal does not only belong to him alone, as it is also the idea of the Onmyoudou. Of course, the [Yin] part might exist somewhere — the part that ethics, morals, and society do not accept; yet, if this existence was denied, Onmyoudou will not be achieved, and supporting the main family, the [Tsuchimikado family], that proclaimed this idea of the [Yin] side is exactly the mission bestowed upon the [Kurahashi family].

So, you must—

For this matter, you must...

“Never forget...”

Father breathed his last after speaking.

Other than his last words, father left him with something else, a place where mother and the other disciples had no knowledge of, a place only inherited by the descendants of the [Kurahashi family], a key that grants access to a huge library of information. After father's funeral was completed, he went to the library himself. From then on, he would often take time off and visit the library without anyone's knowledge, immersing himself in reading the materials inside. This was to deepen the [Kurahashi] blood inside of him, a ritual that was passed on for generations.

Then, in order to fulfill the wish left behind by his father, he stepped on a new path of Onmyoudou.



There was a room of a particular house that doesn't seem strange on the surface.

The interior is rather spacious with spaces at the back for resting purposes; it's just that the windows are tightly sealed, the doors are locked, and there is no way to unlock it from the inside. This room is meant to put someone under house arrest.

If one possesses the ability of Spirit Sight, [looking] at the room as well as at the structure as a whole with all the various barriers set up, one should be able to tell that this is designed to put a magic user under house arrest. The current head of Tsuchimikado, Tsuchimikado Yasuzumi, is placed under house arrest in such a place.

At daybreak, Yasuzumi is already awake. He sat on the chair, silently observing the Rikujinchokuban[9] placed on the table. The expression on his face was calm like the water in the lake without ripples; his

aura was pure as well.

All of a sudden, Yasuzumi's aura showed disturbance. He changed his expression slightly, squinting his eyes as thin as a needle. Then, as if wanting to pierce through the lenses of his glasses, his sharp gaze continually fixated on the Chokuban.

“... Is it time for action?...”

He pondered while saying in an anxious yet hoarse voice.

It was at this moment, the sound of someone knocking on the door could be heard in the room.

Yasuzumi recovered himself, and look towards the door. “—I'm entering.” A deep voice sounded, next the sound of the door unlocking could be heard, the door is unlocked from the outside.

The person who entered the room is Kurahashi. He was already surprised when he heard his voice just now, what is more surprising to him is, the other party is actually holding a tray filled with food. Yazusumi mockingly smiled.

“To actually trouble yourself to bring me breakfast? If I remember correctly, Hinamatsuri is tomorrow, isn't it?”

“It's because of that I came down personally, I think this will be the last chance.”

“I do not think there is any meaning in meeting now.”

“The fact that you are of the main family does not change.”

After entering the room, Kurahashi placed the tray down beside the Chokuban. The food was very simple, before, food was delivered by the disciples of Kurahashi family that were in charge of surveillance.

“So...” Kurahashi sat opposite of Yasuzumi, and continued. “Did the stars show any movement?”

“To lock me in such a place, and you still dare to ask me such a question.”

“Based on your ability, even this kind of place will not affect you. Logically speaking, barriers will not affect the reading of stars.”

“In such close-knitted barriers, star reading will still be affected by the magical force of the barriers. This technique has always been easily affected by the surroundings, not to mention...” After Yasuzumi replied coldly, he revealed a cold look. “Without the need of star reading, one will also know that it is impossible that everyone doesn’t make any move.”

“.....”

Kurahashi silently took on the look head on from the one he should be originally serving from the Onmyoudou main family, he kept a strict expression, not a sign of being shaken.

His eyes met with Yasuzumi’s for some time, “That was indeed a stupid question.” He replied, his tone is very stable.

The main family of the Onmyoudou and the most trusted head of Kurahashi family, these two, ideally should have a master-subordinate relationship, but it has been near twenty years since their relationship broke off. Time has made the two gradually distanced, at the same time dulled the anger and disappointment they had for each other.

Both of them had known each other since young, and both of them graduated from the Onmyou Academy, even though they were being staggered away during their time in the academy, but they had a senior-junior relationship during their time in the Onmyou Agency. After that, one of them left Onmyou Agency to take care of his children, the other stayed on and became the head of the organisation.

Now, the two of them are from the same clan, yet are unmistakably [enemies]. When facing an enemy, what an Onmyouji needs is not hatred, but rather calmness. Yasuzumi and Kurahashi had become better at keeping calm and observing their opponent than in the past.

“Kurahashi, how are you going to deal against your daughter?”

“... I’m not doing anything. I had already given her the best I could give.”

“Are you saying... To gain freedom from the bloodline?”

“No one can escape from the restraints of the bloodline, however, there are still many things that can be cut off solely relying on one’s power, it will be up to her choice from now on.”

“What a ridiculous father... Even though I have no right to say such words.”

“Looks like both of us do not pass as fathers.”

“Yes. But that kind of thing should not be up to us, it should be up to the children themselves to decide.”

“Children huh...”

Kurahashi muttered to himself, for the first time, a smile as faint as snowflakes could be seen between his lips.

“We have also aged.”

“.....”

Yasuzumi did not say anything, silence began to spread between the two of them.

Then, “... Food is getting cold, excuse me for disturbing your mealtime.” Kurahashi stood up from the chair while speaking.

“Kurahashi.” Yasuzumi can’t help but to stop the back that is walking towards the door.

Kurahashi stopped, he turned his head back.

“What is it? You knew it was futile and still wish to go against me? I believe there is no need to warn you, but you will not win against me.”

Yasuzumi silently look at Kurahashi who calmly warned him, with a



putting aside all their past grudges attitude, persuaded the other party with a sincere tone.

“... Won’t you reconsider?”

He is very clear that this is a meaningless question.

Kurahashi smiled once more.

“Unfortunately, this is [Kurahashi family’s] idea.”

After finishing this sentence, Kurahashi left the room, closing the door before locking it.

Yasuzumi observed the closed door, he then lowered his head, and close his eyes.

## Part 2

Even though the report was received earlier, but the real situation before his eyes is worse than imagined. The aura of the surroundings is still chaotic, one can [see] the traces left by the intense magic battle. Shigeoka Shunsuke stood in front of the main gate with his head held high for some time, a sharp gaze was shot beneath his beret.

Exorcist Bureau, Shinjuku Branch.

Last night, this place was attacked by the wanted man, Onmyouji Tsuchimikado Harutora. After destroying the permanent barrier that encapsulates the branch, he invaded the building, and battled against the exorcists that rushed over inside the building, defeating them. Then, just ten minutes before the reinforcements of the Branch and Meguro Branch arrive, he swiftly retreated. Of course, there was no way to track him after that.

“My deepest apologies, for this to happen when the Independent Officer is not around...”

“... This could be said as a damage caused because I am not around.”

He replied calmly to his fearful subordinate, yet his tone unconsciously become imposing. The fact of allowing the terrorist to commit atrocity is placed in front of his eyes, a stabbing pain could be felt in his heart, his usual gloomy face could be seen to be even darker at this moment.

-- Moreover, the other party is only one person.

He had heard about the report on the destruction of the dark temple, but the method of attack this time is even more brilliant, this attack did not just rely on brute force, just pulling some small tricks will not cause this extent of damage as well, one can conclude that this surprise attack is done in an extremely bold and skilled way.

It just... It's because of this, he can't help but feel confused.

-- No.

The things that needed to be done are piling up, now is not the time to think or standing here. Shigeoka straightened his body once again.

“Is the garage all right?”

“Yes. There are no problems with the interior, but because the front is jammed, we have to tidy up if not the towing vehicle cannot access--”

“I got it.”

After saying that, he turned his head to look behind.

There were two towing vehicles that looks out of place with the streets of Shinjuku parked along the road in front of the Branch, there was one more minivan parked behind as well. Shigeoka shouted in that direction... “Open the container doors!” he ordered.

The man sitting on the assistant driver’s seat of the towing vehicle was surprised, and put his head out of the window.

“Shi... Shigeoka Independent Officer, are you thinking of activating them right here?”

“The towing vehicles cannot access, we will let the main body enter first.”

“But the current state of the system--!”

“There is no need to worry, since it is named as [General Purpose] Type, it should be flexible enough for this kind of usage.

He notified with firm determination, the man said... “I can’t stand this.” He retracted his head back into the vehicle, and alighted from the assistant driver’s seat. The man wore his working attire, he seems to brought a walkie-talkie, operating it on his ear using his hand, while giving directions on the small microphone. Next, men from the other towing vehicle and the minivan at the back began to make their way down, and gathered near the towing vehicle.

Shigeoka pulled up the sleeves of his miasma protection clothes, and activated the stopwatch on his watch.

After a few seconds, low motor sounds could be heard from the towing vehicles that stopped on the site.

The side of the towing vehicle is spilt into upper and lower portion, the container door and the top of the vehicle shifted upwards, the side wall shifted downwards, revealing the things that were being transported. What was transported is over two metres in height and width, a large sized machine with a strange shape. Each towing vehicle contains two of such units, totalling of four. "That is...!" The subordinate who came to welcome Shigeoka widened his eyes in surprise, staring at the transported items in the towing vehicles.

The men in working attire made their way into the containers of the towing vehicle, and began working with the directions given through the walkie-talkie. There was a man that brought down the wires that connects to the machines, there were also men that activated the system, inspecting the information on the screen.

"All done!"

That man who alighted from the assistant driver's seat shouted towards Shigeoka, Shigeoka nodded his head lightly.

-- Release magic, [FAR 01], [02], [03], [04], activate."

Next moment, the machines that were sleeping were awakened.

Kada, rumbling noise sounded, the protection armour that that encapsulates the body left their positions, like a flower bud growing outwards. The leg that is fitted with armour started to stretch out. Various joints begin to stretch and lifted up the body.

The impression that the whole thing gave grew by a fold, but compared to the enlargement of size visually, the feeling of the machine being overweight before, disappeared. Not only that, it gave off a feeling of being as nimble as a living thing.

The four machines moved steadily using four pairs of legs, and moved on to the road from the towing vehicle. When the machines

moved, the whole towing vehicle that transports these machines violently rocked up and down, one can conclude they weigh quite heavy. Yet, these machines have light and flexible movements, totally ignoring their own heavy weight, Shigeoka can feel his subordinate behind him gasped.

What appeared on the road were of streamlined armour body, with four pairs of straight legs, machines that move on multiple legs. That was a multiple limbs general purpose mechanical type shikigami [FAR.Ver7], developed and created by Fujiwara Industries and Onmyou Agency together, for the sake of testing yesterday, the final adjustments were made at Hachioji Development Department until late night, these are the four of the total eight machines.

Shigeoka stopped his stopwatch, after confirming the time required for activation, he lightly raised his right eyebrow.

“... Not a bad performance.”

Next, he turned towards the man that was on the assistant driver's seat-- the chief engineer for the [FAR] development, and gave him a nod. The chief engineer grinned and laugh proudly, giving Shigeoka a thumb up. Shigeoka began to control the four [FAR]s, pushing out the small tires that were kept on the front portion of the legs, changing the mode of transport to wheel based.

The four machines moved together, passing through the main gate before making their way to the garage. The subordinate hurriedly moved aside, but his eyes were following the [FAR] all the way.

“... Ju... Just like a sci fi movie...”

“As long as you know how to build one, it is actually not something that impressive, anyways it's just an expensive kind of mechanical type shikigami.”

Shigeoka said calmly, while controlling his new shikigamis.

The [FAR]s he controlling now had the number [01] to [04] printed on their respective armours, these are the number one to number four units of the total eight, the remaining four are said to be delivered by

noon, however, looking at the situation of the branch now, the timing might drag till night time. They are on a very tight schedule, after all, tomorrow is the deadline itself.

“The remaining checks will be done by the engineers of Fujiwara Industries, please comply to their wishes as much as possible. With the branch now in such a state, surely there will be more procedures to follow before official activation, we must quickly reformulate our schedule.”

“Yes.”

The subordinate straightened his body, after giving a bow to Shigeoka, he started running towards the chief engineer.

Shigeoka sent him off by watching him from the side, then he made his way into the building.

“Ask someone to help me lead the way, I want to know the extent of damage here.”

He brought along with him an exorcist that stayed in the branch since the day before, and quickly inspected the whole interior of the building.”

Luckily there weren't major casualties, not only nobody died, there was not a person with heavy injuries either. It's just that this kind of conclusion can be said the attacker showed mercy on purpose, one can see the difference of battle prowess between the two parties is quite significant. Even though many teams here were trained in exorcising spiritual disaster before mobilising, but just an Onmyouji bringing along one shikigami, spending just a night to fully invade one of the branches of the Exorcist Bureau, this situation really show the abilities of Tsuchimikado Harutora were indeed great.

The damage towards people were not serious, however, facilities were heavily damaged, especially the barriers set ups inside and outside were completely eradicated.

“... Truly a complete destruction, even the barrier of the Document Room was destroyed without exception.”

“Yes. It is unknown if this was done to prevent the creation of a blind angle, not just the barrier outside, the barriers inside the building seemed to be completely destroyed as well.”

The Shinjuku branch met with an intrusion from an enemy Onmyouji a few days ago as well, the intruder was an Onmyouji with the nickname of [D] given by the Magic Investigation Department—Ashiya Doman. It was because Miyachi used a long-distance spell that time, he temporarily removed the permanent barrier that encapsulates the whole Branch, it resulted in the barrier not being damaged, however, this time it was destroyed by Tsuchimikado Harutora.

What’s more, he did not just destroy the outer barrier, even the barriers in the building— Magic Tools Safekeeping Room, Document Room or other offices with their own individual barriers, were all either released or destroyed.

“Is the enemy targeting magic tools or equipment?”

“... To attack the Branch just for magic tool or equipment, isn’t it too excessive?”

“Could it be that the enemy is targeting the [FAR]? Tsuchimikado Harutora had three units of Armoured Juggernauts, it could be that he knew of the existence of [FAR], and view that those things will hinder his launch of terror attacks.”

“If that is true, there is no need for him to destroy every single barrier inside the building.”

Shigeoka rejected his subordinate’s views, but what is the true intention of the enemy, he himself could not guess as well.

-- This is indeed a bold and brilliant surprise attack, but there is... no [meaning].

The Shinjuku Branch was heavily damaged, but it wasn’t completely destroyed. Work operations became poor, but the most important part of the Branch— the job of exorcising spiritual disasters seems to not be affected at all. However, this is also natural, the most

important resource of the Exorcist Bureau are the exorcists, as long as they can be mobilised, the Shinjuku Branch will be able to fulfil the Branch's most basic duties. Looking from the tactics used, Tsuchimikado Harutora had indeed launched a spectacular surprise attack, it's just not being able to find out the strategic [value] behind it. If there was no strategic value behind, no matter how great of results achieved in terms of tactics will be meaningless.

Anyway, it's hard to imagine he would attack the Branch for no reason, what kind of strategic value did he exactly formulate?

-- According to the report, Tsuchimikado Harutora moved around the building, and he completely destroyed the interior barriers, could it be...

He was looking for something?

Or is it, he was looking for a **person**?

-- After thinking so hard, there is still no way to break away from speculating.

Assuming Tsuchimikado Harutora is looking for someone in the Onmyou Agency, it is most likely he will look for the Tsuchimikado Family that were arrested in Kichijoji. They are currently handled by Kurahashi Chief, their locations and the things they are doing now, Shigeoka had no idea. Since the chief had no intention of granting him this piece of information, any speculation will just be futile.

Regarding Tsuchimikado Harutora's intention is the same as well. If there is a way to know the other party's true intention, it will greatly help in having a direction when formulating strategies and counter tactic methods.

However, [finding] his true intention is the job of the Magic Investigation Department, not Shigeoka.

Right now, Shigeoka only need to concentrate in reorganising the Branch, and begin preparations for the next day. Since the exorcists were not injured or dead, there is no need for any significant changes to the battle plan.



-- I am just an exorcist that's all.

To be in a position of authority, delivering tasks, all he need to do is to fulfil his duties. As a [Twelve Divine General]— wrong, as a Onmyouji, this is Shigeoka's [job], this conviction has never been shaken before.

Never been shaken before— ideally it should be like this.

“—Shi... Shigeoka Independent Officer!”

After completing most of the inspection on the damage condition of the building interior, a few staff members rushed towards Shigeoka's side.

Shigeoka's expression reactively become stern.

“What is it?”

As he asked, his consciousness flew towards the [FAR]s in the garage. Spiritual disasters rarely happen during this time period, but the situation now is special, anything can happen anytime is not be strange at all. To tackle any kinds of emergencies immediately— Shigeoka had this kind of obligation.

Yet, what shook Shigeoka this time was an attack which he could not have imagined.

The staffs rushed along the corridor panting, once standing in front of Shigeoka, they looked at each other, not knowing how to explain.

One of the staff lowered his voice, “Ac... Actually...” he began to whisper beside Shigeoka's ear.

Shigeoka was puzzled as he listened to the staff. After hearing, his expression changed to that of surprise and anger.

“... Utter nonsense... even it is from the internet, surely the other party would know how tense the situation is right now? And this kind of news came from a big publishing company?”

“Yes, it's from the [Onmyou Monthly Magazine] website.”

“Any directive from the main branch?”

“Not yet so far, because this content is published just recently.”

“Is that so... Instead of dealing with this rumour right now, it is cleverer to just ignore the other party, there is no need to waste resources on this kind of stupid stuff.”

He said in a scolding tone, he furrowed his brows, making his eccentric look to become even more malicious looking.

Shigeoka took pride in his work, he took meaning in life to deliver tasks that were successfully completed. Because of this, from his bottom of his heart, he disdains worthless people that speak such irresponsible words of defamation as a method of sabotaging others, especially when such things will hinder his job.

-- Doing such things for the sake of creating debate? Too irrational.

Even though they should punish the publishing company severely, but the most important thing right now is the day when terrorist attack will be launched is nearing. This is the job of the Exorcist Bureau, everyone had the same level of mind as well.

They cannot afford to spare their attention to other matters.

“There is no need to specially report to me on this kind of baseless rumours, besides, now is still working hours, all of you are to return to your positions now.”

Shigeoka ordered them angrily, yet none of the staff left.

“This... This matter cannot be regarded as completely baseless, in fact...”

The staff seem to fear the eyes and ears of the surroundings, he started to whisper beside Shigeoka once again.

Shigeoka's expression changed suddenly.

“What did you say?”

He cannot help but exclaimed, his mind was in shock. Next, he was flustered by the fact that he panicked, and meaninglessly readjusted his hat. To the Shigeoka who always kept his cool on purpose, this is a very rare reaction.

He silently gritted his teeth, the rest of the staff held their breath and concentrated on observing the Independent Officer's reaction.

"... All right, let me take a look at the website."

Shigeoka spoke towards the staffs, he then followed behind them through the corridor.



The call did not go through.

The message of asking to leave a voicemail came through the mobile phone, however, Yuge had already left a voicemail on the other party's mobile earlier. She could only end the call helplessly.

"... I cannot stand this. Always during this kind of important times, that moustache guy..."

The main branch of Exorcist Bureau. Yuge is alone in the conference room. She finally managed to find a time slot to leave her job for a short while, she rushed into the room the moment she found it empty.

The time now is 11am. Spiritual disasters normally occur during timings from evenings till midnight, in other words, from to Omagatoki till Ushimitsudoki<sup>[10]</sup>, the amount will drop sharply once daybreak comes, this is why to the exorcists, this timing is the time for them to have an easier chance to take a breather. In order to prevent spiritual disaster terrorist attacks, Yuge is on a special roster now, resulting in her living in the main branch for consecutive days. If it was the usual days, she would be resting right now.

However, her subordinate woke her up today. After reading a certain news, she realised that now isn't the time for her to be sleeping.

The [Onmyouji Monthly Magazine] Editorial Department has put up an article to expose the Onmyou Agency on their official website, the contents indicate that the previous two occurrences of spiritual disaster terror attacks, even the forewarned spiritual disaster terror attack that will be launched by the Twin Horn Syndicate the next day, the true mastermind behind all these is the current chief of Onmyou Agency, Kurahashi Genji.

The report emphasised the relationship between Kurahashi Genji and the current ruling party member of parliament, Satake Masumi, as well. Regarding the history behind the establishment of the Lingering Spirit Division of the Imperial Household Agency, the creation of the underground organisation Twin Horn Syndicate, and how the two of them used each other, gaining power till this day, every detail was described realistically. Normally speaking, there was no need to care about such reports, to the point where one would suspect if the person who wrote this report had gone mad.

However, professional magazine such as [Onmouji Monthly Magazine] which boast a reputation of being the most traditional, as well as reporting accurate content that gave themselves good ratings. They had many loyal readers, Yuge herself had bought a few copies before to read as well. Even though it's on the internet, for [Onmyouji Monthly Magazine] to publish such absurd article, surely problems are created— and is [serious problems] with reporting, she couldn't believe it for a moment. Her subordinate who is knowledgeable about the internet investigated, reported that there were readers who suspect if the website had been hijacked by hackers.

Yet, because of that article, the Exorcist Bureau now— wrong, it's all the employees of Onmyou Agency that are panicking **to the extreme**. The main reason is because, other than the article itself, a short video was uploaded as well.

An old man sitting in a wheelchair, revealing the crimes of the Onmyou Agency while facing the video camera.

That was the long missing former Magical Crime Investigation Division Chief, National First-Class Onmyouji, nicknamed [The Divine Fan], Amami Daizen.

The feeling of shakiness and confusion after viewing the video for the first time had not disappeared, this feeling should be what people described as speechless isn't it. Under her feet felt like the sky falling and the earth splits. If this is a Second-Grade, this will definitely be the largest scale Second-Grade magic Yuge has experienced in her entire life.

-- This video doesn't seem to be fabricated... yet... why?

The disappearance of Amami was during two years ago during the middle of operation to wipe out Twin Horn Syndicate— to be accurate, it was on that [night]. On that day, other than a magic battle breaking out with the remaining members of the Twin Horn Syndicate, there was an exorcism of a level four spiritual disaster at Meguro Branch, it was a truly chaotic day for everyone. By evening, everything concluded, Onmyou Agency and Exorcist Bureau were busy with the aftermath, it was in the midst of this chaos, Amami [disappeared].

In fact, for the second in command to disappear suddenly, was quite a huge blow for the Onmyou Agency. To be able to overcome that difficult situation, it was fortunate that Kurahashi Chief personally appeared on site, directly carried the duty of command. From then on, Kurahashi not only held the positions of Chief of Onmyou Agency, Chief of Exorcist Bureau, he even holds the current position of the Chief of Magic Investigation Department.

-- After the disappearance of Amami Chief, all the power of Onmyou Agency indeed concentrated on the hands of Kurahashi. But even so...!

The Amami who appeared in the video is way thinner from the Amami from Yuge's memories, the appearance of him on the wheelchair pains people watching. But the most eye-catching part is the X shaped scar that is on his forehead— that perhaps is a seal.

That seal was the exact same ones on the foreheads of Kagami Reiji and Dairenji Suzuka who escaped from the Onmyou Agency a few days ago, it is a seal that seals magic powers, a magic technique used mainly to limit or completely rob a magic user from his or her powers.

The one who placed the seal on Kagami and Suzuka was none other than Kurahashi Chief. In order to not let the person with the seal placed on to have any ways of removing it— it is designed to not even allow a National First-Class Onmyouji to remove it themselves, it is an extremely complicated and difficult technique. From what Yuge knows, there is only one Onmyouji who knows this technique, and it is Kurahashi Chief.

If it is a simple technique, other Onmyouji are able to perform something of similar as well. Moreover, just from the video on the internet alone, it is difficult to judge if the mark on the forehead is a real seal. The video should be nonfabricated, but it could also be that a shikigami made from a simple technique to look like Amami before filming.

-- But... if this video is faked through the use of the simple technique, why would the user of the technique would specially place the seal on the forehead?

The seal on Amami's forehead looks rather [convincing], as long as one is familiar with magic—especially the upper echelons of Onmyou Agency, they are able to feel the realness of the seal, it applies to that weak appearance and the wheelchair as well. If there are not much changes to his looks compared to before his disappearance, that will then make people strongly suspect if it is created by simple techniques.

Another thing, it could be that the person in the video is Amami himself, but being controlled by someone— thinking from the current situation, the person most likely is Tsuchimikado Harutora.

However, this inference has one contradiction. Tsuchimikado Harutora awakened as Yakou's reincarnation, was [after] Amami's disappearance. Of course, if Amami went into hiding of his own will and made contact with Tsuchimikado Harutora after that, it would solve the contradiction, it's just this thinking seems to be too forced to be true.

-- Moreover, Amami Chief doesn't look like he was asked to do this.

Amami on the wheelchair, with an appearance that pains people

obviously had weakened quite a bit, but the sharp gaze from his eyes when looking at the video camera, it is no doubt it's from one of the important figures of the [Twelve Divine Generals], Amami of [The Divine Fan].

His eyes emit a strong sense of determination and a sharp sense of rationality, really doesn't look like he was under any influence, and it doesn't look like a simple technique could bring out such feelings of realness. These were the first thoughts of Yuge after watching the video.

This way, there are only two possibilities left now.

One is that Amami was a member of the Twin Horn Syndicate and had betrayed the Onmyou Agency.

The other will be... Amami was speaking the truth entirely.

Yuge looked at her phone that is gripped on her right hand as if looking for help.

She ordered her subordinates to not be disarrayed, not to believe this kind of baseless talks, and focus on their work in front of them. Luckily— this doesn't sound fair, but so far only Amami's statement support the article. Even if the person in the video is Amami himself, there is no way to prove that Kurahashi indeed committed those crimes mentioned.

Even so, they cannot treat this issue lightly. As long as the upper management do not come out with a clear statement to refute this kind of saying, there will be surely a widespread panic on the ground. In addition, the response from the upper management must be fast, because the day when the forewarned spiritual disaster terrorist attack will be launched is tomorrow.

“Please pick up the phone, commander...!”

The person she just called is her superior Miyachi. No one picked up her call, her phone had recorded nearly ten lines of [Moustache] on it.

-- Could it be that he is dealing with the matter regarding the video?

For this kind of video to surface, and to not care about his subordinates and not picking up the phone, what is he doing...?

If she got angry with Miyachi's laid-back attitude it's still considered okay, but just from watching Amami's video, Yuge's spirits has reached levels of extreme. Even without the video, she had tightened her nerves to do everything to prevent terror attacks, her workload has piled up as well. Last night, Shinjuku Branch was reported to be surprise attacked from the person who forewarned the launch of spiritual disaster terrorist attack, Tsuchimikado Harutora. In the afternoon, she was scheduled to rush over for emergency repairs of the permanent barrier that was destroyed from the surprise attack.

"... That's right, at least we cannot disregard Tsuchimikado Harutora's actions..."

Amami impeached Kurahashi Chief, but he doesn't seem to be working together with Tsuchimikado Harutora. The true intentions of Tsuchimikado Harutora is still a mystery, right now the most important thing is to look at the fact that he attacked the Branch, and focus on bringing him to justice.

Regrettably, this is not a simple case. If what Amami said were true, continue following the orders of the higher ups will result in an irreversible end.

"If I could contact Kogure-Senpai..."

If there is somebody to discuss, she could have been calmer regarding this matter, at least she could have escape from the current situation of continuously making guesses. It is especially this kind of situation, Kogure can be considered a very reliable senior.

However, ever since Kogure was transferred to Magic Investigation Department, the two of them did not contact each other anymore. Compared to Yuge, Kogure had a more intimate relationship with Amami, she wondered what he would think after he watched the video.

-- There were rumours saying that the magic battle two days ago was related to Kogure-senpai...



She doesn't know. She always feels when she is at a place where she is not familiar, a place where she cannot see, there will be a lot of things disturbing. She had a kind of feeling as if she was forsaken at the same place, panicking. Almost subconsciously, she intended to make a call once again.

It was before she pressed the call button on the phone, a call came.

-- Commander?

Initially her whole face lit up, but after looking at the caller's name on the phone, disappointment and uncertainty appeared in her mind. She did not expect that person to call.

Kadei Byakuran, one of the two currently remaining Special Spirit Sensor, the elder sister of the twins from the Onmyoudou Noble House of Kadei.

Yuge unknowingly straightened her face. As a colleague who works together in the Exorcist Bureau, Yuge is quite familiar with the twins. Not just being familiar, the relationship between the three of them can be considered intimate. Not knowing why—Yuge is younger in terms of age—the two of them treated her well, often inviting her to join them for lunch in a spur of moment. It's just, to call Yuge at this timing, it is very hard to imagine that she is calling to invite her to join them for a meal.

... No, that twins are capable of anything, but surely, they must had watched the video before making this call.

-- What should I do?

Yuge doesn't dislike the twins, and she is impressed with their exceptional abilities of Spirit Sight. As for their ignorance of worldly affairs, after she got used to it, she began to like their innocence. Moreover, their workloads are heavier than Yuge's, yet they did not hold a grudge or even complain before, their serious attitude towards work had gained respect from Yuge as well. No matter good or bad, the two of them are truly [rich family's girls], more accurately, [rich family's girls with unswerving determination].

However, if they are going to ask for an explanation regarding that video, she have no answers for them. If it's others, she could give a half-hearted explanation, but she doesn't think the twins would accept her reasonings.

“.....”

Yuge looked at her phone, in her heart, she felt like avoiding them.

Yet, the feeling of wanting to discussing this with someone of similar stand became stronger, it could be that the twins had the same feelings as well. They may have felt insecure after watching the video and wish to look for someone to talk about it.

Yuge shook off her hesitation, and took a deep breath.

After pressing the receive call button, “Hello.” She started speaking on the phone.

“Mari? Something bad happened, something truly bad happened. Are you free now? Ah! It's me, I'm Byakuran.”

The familiar voice of Byakuran could be heard from the phone, it is hard to know from her tone if she is panicking. Even this kind of moment she is still the same, Yuge felt a sense of relief while listening to her now.

“Everything will be fine, Byakuran, are you referring to the video?”

“Video? What video? What are you talking about?”

Yuge couldn't help but stunned. After a few seconds of silence, her mind restarted, “... Err, that... Wh... What?” But she really did not know how she should continue saying.

“Mari? Hello? What video are you talking about?”

“I thought you were saying [something bad happened]--”

“Eh? Ah, yes, that's right, something bad happened, can I talk to you about this?”

“Isn’t what you wish to discuss related to the video?”

“Video? From the start, I haven’t been understanding anything that you are saying.”

The conversation between the two is as incongruous as the mouth of a horse on the head of an ox, but to reach this situation, the fault lies with Yuge. She started communicating with the other party with her own assumptions, to put it simply the two of them—

“That... Byakuran, could it be that you haven’t seen that video?”

After she did this confirmation, Byakuran seemed to be slightly angry, “Really.” She began speaking in a huff.

“Didn’t I say that I do not know what video you are talking about? How could I have seen something that I have no knowledge of, I can’t figure out what you are talking about.”

“Oh... I understand, I was too anxious, I’m sorry.”

Yuge could not help but dumbfounded, she apologised to the other party.

Yuge felt that she got driven crazy, but it is also because of this, the insecurity she felt just now disappeared without a trace. The tensed expression she had ever since she watched the video returned to normal, even though nothing has been solved yet, but her mood has relaxed slightly.

Luckily, she picked up this call. As she is feeling happy for herself, “So you were saying-- Byakuran? What is the bad happening that you are talking about? Do you have something to discuss with me?” While she recalls the chicken and duck talk before, she renews her question to the other party about her intention of calling her. “Yes.” Byakuran quickly changed her tone back to before, spoke with excitement.

“This matter is very serious, actually just now--”

After speaking halfway, “Onee-san.” Another person’s voice could be heard behind Byakuran, interrupting her.

That is the younger sister of the twins, Kurogiku, her voice is slightly further away from her sister's, "I forgot about it." Yuge could hear Byakuran's voice as she replies her sister.

"Mari, can we discuss this after we meet?"

"Can't we talk about it over the phone?"

"Yes. Not over the phone."

Byakuran said firmly.

Hesitation flashed into Yuge, "No problem." Yet, she replied back quickly. Yuge thought to herself, since she had already mentioned about the video, she would like to hear about their thoughts as well, compared to the phone, she prefers meet ups.

It's a pity she is very busy currently, she had to make a trip to Shinjuku Branch later on, there is no way to meet them immediately.

-- Oh yes, I remember Shigeoka-senpai had returned from Hachioji today... At least I can discuss this matter with him when I'm at Shinjuku later.

It will be best I discuss with him before discussing with the twins.

"I am busy right now. Can I contact you again once I'm free?"

"Sure, no problem, this way it will be convenient for us as well. I shall wait for your call then, you mustn't forget okay."

Yuge forced a smile after hearing that childlike tone, replying a yes while giving a nod. After ending the call, she let out a big sigh.

-- Alright, I shall stop thinking so hard alone, the most important thing right now is to focus on the work on hand.

Pa. she used both her palms and clapped her face, refreshing herself, she then exit the conference room and return to work.

## Part 3

“The reaction of the public is more intense than predicted.”

Kobayashi said that straight away. The mobile phone is on loudspeaker mode, Natsume and the rest listened attentively to the reporting voice echoing in the living room.

“The news had spread very fast as well, it’s just that it did not develop into a fierce debate, the isolation of the magic world is indeed an obstacle. Everyone is either half believing or just watching from the side lines, conversely, there are some that reacted hysterically. However, most of the people could not understand what had happened, they are just holding to a feeling of insecurity while observing the situation, this is mostly the same outcome as predicted.”

“I had already expected the public reaction will be slow on uptake, moreover, the other medias don’t seem to be doing anything, this matter has spread further than initially expected, which is good enough for us to rejoice.”

“Yes. It was all because of the prestige of [The Divine Fan] Amami, if it was somebody else, they would not be able to create such a reaction. Even though there is no proof, but through various outlets, we heard that the people on the ground were quite shaken.”

Kobayashi’s excited voice could be heard through the mobile phone’s loud speaker.

In Onmyou Agency, the bureaucrat impression that Kurahashi Chief gives off is quite strong. Similar to the Exorcist Bureau, it is the same for Miyachi Chief being the onsite leader, the onsite leader for Onmyou Agency is Amami— as a matter of fact the he is the one that has been active for many years as front-line commander, who was also Chief of Magic Investigation Department before.

It is precisely because someone like Amami making the accusation, the blow towards the members of the Agency is greater.

“Looking at the situation now, everybody is only shaken.”

“Ah ah. Shaken but not to the extent of crumbling, that organisation isn’t so weak. More importantly, did the other party took any direct action?”

“I have not received anything yet.”

“Alright. We will continue counting on you subsequently, please be wary of Magic Investigation Department.”

“—But, if anything really happens, no matter how careful we are, we will still be unable to resist them. On the contrary, you guys be careful too, if you have any information regarding Wakamiya, please contact me.” After finish saying, Kobayashi ended the call.

-- This is the beginning.

Natsume had this kind of feeling.

It is said that all the calls made to [Onmyouji Monthly Magazine] right now are all enquiring about that exposition article, Kobayashi had achieved far more than expected on this matter. According to him, Wakamiya had sent him a report regarding the conspiracy between Kurahashi and his men, but just the report alone, making the choice of helping Amami and become enemies with Onmyou Agency, to the Editorial Department and others, it was an extremely difficult choice.

“A debt of favour is really something that you owe as long as you live, before I finish clearing all the debts, I cannot die yet.”

Amami spoke in an old-fashioned way, then he clapped his fan and turned towards Natsume and the rest.

They are now situated in a condominium in Roppongi, other than Natsume and Amami, Touji, Tenma and Suzuka were there as well, Kyouko and Suisen is in the other room.

“... Ultimately, it got the attention of the public.” After Natsume confirmed, “Yes.” Amami nodded. “There is still no specific course of action?” Tenma asked straightaway.

“To be clear, this accusation is ridiculous to no end, the only vouch is the person who spoke those words, which is me only. To have such high expectations at this stage, that is too greedy.”

“... Because I am in the industry that’s why I did not know, the public indeed doesn’t understand much about the internal organisation structure of the magic world, to the point where knowing the contents of the accusation did not give them the sense of danger.”

“To be accurate, they did not feel the sense of [real] danger. After all, it is a group of people chanting some baffling mantra, in order to make some baffling disaster go away, we can’t blame the public for not able to figure out what is going on.”

When Amami was exposing Kurahashi Chief this time, he did not mention about Souma’s existence. This is done in order to be easily understood, through simplifying the contents of the exposition. The enemy had spent great efforts in covering up the traces of the Souma Clan’s participation, there will definitely be a chance to mention about them in the future, it’s just Amami and the rest had determined at this point in time, focusing on [the bad guy is Kurahashi Chief] will give the best results.

The main reason of the denounce this time is to create social debate — to create a situation where Naota can take action, that is why content wise the easier to understand the better. It’s just...

“... I still cannot bring myself to accept this. If I appeared in the video as well, there will surely be a wider coverage, because I have a higher reputation in the society.”

Suzuka pulled a long face in displeasure, “There she goes again.” Amami gave an awkward expression.

“Haven’t I explained this before, Suzuka. To put an underaged girl in front of the public, it will be easy to arouse suspicion.”

Amami repeated what he had said many times before.

Facing Suzuka who volunteered to expose, it was Amami who

stopped her. What Suzuka said wasn't wrong, as a famous idol of the Onmyou Agency, she is more well-known in the public compared to Amami. Even now that she had stopped her idol activities these few years, she still has quite a few fans, surely there are many people out there who still remember her looks and her name.

Amami's accusation only had a small coverage in the news, to what extent is the public concerned is still unknown. If Suzuka appeared as well, it will definitely gain attention from those who weren't concerned with the magic world.

It's just that even with Suzuka's accusations, it might still be difficult for this to turn into a debate.

The media might be concerned with this news, but they might treat this in half-hearted way next time, only being curious about it. The moment they push an underage girl to the frontline to expose the crimes of the Onmyou Agency, the chances of the public treating this piece of news with seriousness will be very low— Worse, the people that Natsume and the rest wanted to influence may disregard her words.

Of course, in Amami's heart, he is also against the idea of using a young girl like Suzuka as a [political] tool, but he did not reach this conclusion based on his own personal feelings. He is not treating Suzuka as a child, and he did not have the intention of belittling her worth, he purely feel that she is [unsuitable] for this mission.

"I understand you wish to amend the mistake you made with Akino that time, I will create enough opportunities for you in future, so you should wait for the chance now."

After listening to Amami, Suzuka pouted unhappily, her face flushed slightly, it seems like Amami was correct about her.

The exposition this time is just the [start], after lying low for so long, this is the [attack] Natsume and the rest finally used, it is no wonder they are so anxious.

However, this matter cannot be rushed, precisely because they are in a dangerous situation where they need to risk, they need to be extra



careful when choosing [what to risk], this is what Amami said. There is not much time remaining, so they must use the remaining time for things that will be meaningful to them. Moreover, because they do not have the energy to leisurely wait for reply, they cannot make a move carelessly.

“Even though this is a good start, but the subsequent developments will be difficult to predict... Touji, there is still no contact from your father’s side?”

“... No.”

Touji replied in a heavy tone to Amami’s affirmation.

He had already told everyone about the exchange that happened between him and Member of Parliament Naota, regrettably, the result doesn’t seem well.

But, the situation has not fall into that of despair, Touji calmly and positively explained to his comrades about the [confidence] he felt at the end.

“The confidence I felt at the end in fact is just my own feeling, I did not affirm this with the other party... even though as the person who screwed up, I do not have the right to say such things— To be honest, to bet everything on that man, I think it is too risky.”

Touji said, after finish reporting.

Of course, there was no need for Touji to remind, Amami is using various methods now. He is fully utilising all the connections he made in the past, trying to convince them to [stand against] Onmyou Agency. For example, those who weren’t present right now, Kyouko, with Suisen accompanying her, are in the other room reading stars, attempting to find out which candidate of the [Twelve Divine Generals] they can make contact with.

[The Twelve Divine Generals] who works for the Onmyou Agency, if they had seen the exposition article and Amami’s video— The appearance of the long missing former Mystical Investigation Chief, surely, they will have their own ideas. If there is a way to make

contact with them, convince them to join this side, it won't be impossible to overturn the situation then. Needless to say, to move recklessly will possibly cause them to get arrested, besides, without any evidence, carrying out this matter is definitely not easy...

"Not able to exploit the situation and follow up is really vexing— yet, complaining doesn't help either, moreover, this is originally not a situation where just the few of us can change."

Amami words sounds depressing, but this is exactly the reason why Natsume and the rest cannot take any actions as they please. No matter how hard they struggle now, just with Natsume and the rest, is impossible to break out of the current situation. To stop the enemy's plot, they must consolidate the power of the people in the surroundings or organisations, that's why they are just waiting for the public's reaction.

In addition, they were waiting not just for Naota's reply.

-- **Harutora**... Natsume clenched her fist tightly.

"... Harutora and Ohtomo-Sensei had already seen the video right."

The person who mumbled is Tenma.

Natsume reactively become focused. "Should be." Touji replied with a nod from the side.

"Even though we do not know how frequent the two of them surfs the internet, but logically speaking, both of them are keeping a close eye to Onmyou Agency's movements, it is impossible that they did not notice the panic in the Agency, they will naturally investigate after noticing."

"... Speaking of which, that stupid guy sure knows to choose time, just when we are doing our best to prove his innocence, he went ahead and launch what surprise attack."

"No choice, it was last midnight that Harutora appeared at Shinjuku Branch... before the website was updated. That guy is running out time too."

“But wouldn’t this give people a bad impression? What if even our accusation thought to be fabricated as well?”

Suzuka spoke angrily, just that her anger comes from insecurity. In fact, when they know about Harutora attacked the Shinjuku Branch, Natsume and everyone were extremely furious.

Harutora had took the opposing stand against the Onmyou Agency in the past, but when things develop to the point of attacking a Branch, the impression that it gives people will be vastly different. Luckily no one died, but the party that was attacked surely will think this exposition article is unbelievable. To Natsume and the rest that is working so hard to recruit even one comrade, this is an extremely great loss.

-- If only we had exposed few hours earlier...

Maybe he would not have attacked the Exorcist Bureau Branch, no, the situation may be still the same, in the end, there is still no knowing of Harutora’s true intention.

“What is exactly Harutora’s motive for attacking the Shinjuku Branch?”

“... The only thing that I could think of is he was looking for Souma Takiko, other than that, I really have no idea.”

Touji replied Tenma’s question. No matter friend or foe, everyone knows that Souma Takiko is the key character. Natsume and the rest had given up on using the method of directly launching attacks on her, but it is a different affair for Harutora, now that he had invaded Shinjuku Branch alone.

“Could it be that Takiko was in the Shinjuku Branch last night?”

Suzuka furrowed her brows while saying, “No.” Tenma immediately rejected that possibility.

“If Souma Takiko was there, Yase Doji will surely be by her side, logically speaking it would then develop into quite a large-scale magic battle, but the attack last night doesn’t seem to be that way.”

“So, he made a wasted trip? He did not know she wasn’t there, and barged into the Shinjuku Branch like an aimless housefly?”

“This could also prove that guy had ran out of ideas as well.”

Amami replied the stunned Suzuka with a straight face.

If the result of Harutora’s hurried actions clashed head on with our action of exposition, it truly makes us feel fretful, but since both sides is unable to work together, it is inevitable for this situation to happen. Perhaps, Harutora did not expect this exposition to happen as well.

The problem lies ahead.

“... Amami-san, if Harutora is looking for Takiko, what action do you think he will take after he saw that video?”

Touji, Tenma and Suzuka were also concerned about the question Natsume raised, her voice sounded stiff— it is because she spoke in a desperate tone. After listening to Natsume’s question, Amami stayed silent for a moment, he observed Natsume’s expression, and clapped the fan on his hand.

“If I had the answer, we would not be suffering now.”

He shrugged his shoulders while forcing a smile.

“The enemy of our enemy is a friend— this is the best scenario, but we have no idea what is his final objective. That said, even if we wish to work together, we have no idea the location of each other is as well. If we are talking about intuition, looking at his past actions, it is impossible for him to coordinate with us now, to honestly hold himself back.”

“... Yes.”

“It’s just--”

“What is it?”

After listening to Amami’s thoughts, Natsume was about to lower her

head, but because he was about to speak and then hesitated, Natsume raised her head.

Amami watched her reaction.

“I feel that this situation is a somehow the same.”

“Same... Same as what?”

“That time when you guys met up. You guys did not get each other’s contact that time, but it was that moment when the news about the arrest of Tsuchimikadou Family was broadcasted, everyone came forward at the same time, and believed that the others would take action as well. I can tell you right now... That was a fascinating performance.”

Amami spoke, while looking at Natsume, Touji, Tenma and Suzuka alternatively.

“It wasn’t just you people that took action that time, **Harutora** took action as well, and it was at an excellent time... This is why, I am hoping, hoping that you guys can work together with **everyone** like last time.”

“.....”

Natsume did not reply, only widening her eyes and stared at Amami.

Amami’s eyes were indeed filled with trust and expectancy. Amami who has such great abilities actually held such expectations towards themselves, Natsume can’t help but feel heat in her chest.

She felt deep pride, “This is our glory.” She said out the words in her heart directly.

She felt very happy, for being able to gain trust and recognition from the person she respected, this kind of feeling, perhaps could be turned into courage, for her to not fear of challenges when facing difficulties.

-- What Amami-san said is correct...

It is the same for Harutora.

Didn't Harutora rushed over first that time? It is impossible for him not to be concern with Natsume and the rest, and should have already seen that exposition article, surely, he is concerned with the movements of Natsume and the rest right now.

There is no knowing of what considerations or thoughts Harutora has, and there is no way to predict how his actions will affect the conclusion.

However, Harutora is a comrade of Natsume and the rest, he is equally concerned about Natsume and the rest, this should be believable.

"As expected of a skilled user of spirit language, extremely well versed in controlling people's hearts."

"Haven't I said before, we are in a situation where we would even grab on a single grass. As long as you wish to listen, I can speak till you are contented."

Amami grinned, speaking to the joking Touji, but these words of Touji perhaps half of it was a cover up of his embarrassment. The light conversation between those two made Tenma laughed after listening, Suzuka on the other hand, showed a stunned expression.

The current tense atmosphere slightly eased, it felt something like a tight nerve relaxing. Just like before doing exercises, the need of stretching muscles, to perform in the best condition, there is a need for [pacing]. Even at this emergency situation where time is running out, to be making fun of each other actually shows that Natsume and the rest are strong.

Yet just at this moment—

"Natsume-chan! Pull yourself together!"

All of a sudden, Kyouko who was reading stars in the other room rushed to the living room, another person that followed hurriedly behind her into the living room is a woman in Kimono, shikigami Suisen.

What happened? Everyone quickly changed their attention, focusing on Kyouko.

The next moment.

-- Ah.

Natsume's vision swayed.

As if the power source disconnected, thoughts and feelings became blank, the world disappeared from Natsume's eyes.

As Natsume's body start to fall, Kyouko rushed over and held her quickly. Before the two of them fell directly onto the floor, Touji, who was at the side, quickly supported them.

"Natsume-chan!" Kyouko shouted loudly.

The loud shout reached the ears.

-- Hic! Hokuto!

Natsume ordered in her heart, seemingly at the same time, the aura of Hokuto possessing Natsume's body began to wriggle—

Natsume's vision returned.

"— Phew!"

She let out a deep breath, and started to use her entire body's strength to breathe. Perhaps realising Natsume's condition had stabilised, Kyouko let out a sigh of relief, relaxing her grip on her.

"Nat... Natsume, are you okay?"

"Natsume, could it be that you are having an attack again?"

Natsume raised her hand, replied to both Suzuka and Tenma who went pale. She adjusted her breath, "... I'm okay." She said.

"Tha... Thank you, Kyouko."

"I [saw] your aura while I was reading stars. Natsume, you are a

living spirit, I should not be able to read your stars... So, I was still suspecting in the beginning, luckily I made it in time.”

“What is going on, Natsume? Didn’t you light the soul-forging incense?”

“Yes... I did it this morning as well...”

Natsume was in shock, replying Touji, who was looking at her sternly for a confirmation.

It’s just on the other hand, she knew in her heart what is going on.

-- The emergency treatment is getting ineffective.

Originally this is a just a temporary treatment, it could be that the effective time has become shorter, the technique Harutora used to tie Natsume’s soul is becoming undone.

-- How could this be?

For this to happen when there is nothing going on, if magic is used, there will be no telling how it would affect Harutora’s technique. That said, it’s impossible to not use magic. Touji cannot use his Oni powers against Takiko, Natsume’s strength in the frontlines will become increasingly important. Natsume’s unstable condition will weaken the team’s strength by a lot, in addition, she is aware of this more than others. Her comrades kept silent, looking at the pale Natsume.

“It’s okay... I shall go adjust once more. I’m fine.”

Natsume stood up on her own, her mouth kept repeating the same sentence. Her tone sounded hollow, but no one could say any comforting words.

This time, “... Now is the time for you guys to recuperate and store up energy.” Amami said calmly, removing his feelings in his words on purpose. “It would be best to adjust yourself to the greatest condition.”

The consideration of the notification out of obligation made Natsume



feel extremely touched, “Yes.” Natsume silently nodded, made her way to prepare the soul-forging incense.

The time left before Hinamatsuri dusk is less than 30 hours. Definitely going to pull through this difficulty— Natsume silently prayed in her heart.



“Honestly, I didn’t expect they would use this method out of the blue. To expose through the internet, it really doesn’t seem like an idea Amami would come out with.”

Speaking finish, Yashamaru shrugged. Akino sat at the corner of the sofa, attentively observing the situation of the surroundings.

She was brought to what seems to be the main hall of a particular floor of a building. Those around were Takiko, Yashamaru and Kumomaru, there were also two people that she never met before.

One of them is in the fifties, he is wearing a formal belt, a petrous kind of man. She had seen this person in the news, that is Onmyou Agency Chief, Kurahashi Genji. The other was a middle-aged man in western clothing, she couldn’t recognise him, just feels that he seems to be a politician. That is Satake Masumi, there are sayings that he is also one of the Souma Clan people.

In other words, the masterminds of the enemy camp are gathering at this moment, they are gathering in front of Akino, it can’t be help that she is holding her breath.

-- Why bring me to this place.

Kurahashi and Satake seem to be thinking the same thing as well. They knew about Akino, even though they did not have intention of questioning her background, they gave her an astonished look when they saw her. Yet, after looking at Takiko— even though she had tried to stay away as far as possible— who is sitting beside her, their faces showed that they have accepted the fact, to the point of having

an expression of given up trying to persuade.

It has been more than one day since Akino has arrived at this building, Takiko had stood by her side all this time. She doesn't seem to be observing Akino, the two of them had chatted occasionally, and she doesn't seem to be looking for Akino for something too. She just stays beside Akino, when she is moving around the building, she will surely request Akino to follow as well.

Akino can't help but notice, so she directly asked the person in question for a reason. Yet, Takiko only replied with a laugh... "It's no matter." and did not answer her question directly.

It should be alright to refuse, but Akiko did not do it. Just like what Takiko herself had proclaimed, she did not have any intention of harming Akino, that is why resisting is pointless. On the contrary, after being captured, she could at least gather information in the enemy camp, in order to achieve this goal, it is a wise choice staying close to Takiko. It just until now, she had not gotten any useful information.

She only found out one thing, that is Takiko did not do anything for the entire day. On the other hand, her shikigami, Yashamaru, had fully given his duty of bodyguarding to Kumomaru, and is not around his own mistress most of the time. Even though he will return once every few hours, he only returns to report a few things and disappear immediately again. He seems to be preparing for the launch of the spiritual disaster terrorist attack tomorrow— rushing for the sake of the large-scale magic ritual preparations.

It was said that Takiko is the key figure to the ritual, and the ritual is held tomorrow, yet being the most important person, she had nothing to do, this shows she is already prepared. At the same time, Yashamaru, who originally should remain at his mistress side, is running about outside, this means the preparations of the ritual is at the final stages. In other words, victory is on sight for the enemy.

However, Natsume and the rest had finally take action.

"Firstly, I would like to offer my apology to the princess of the Souma Clan, I ordered my subordinate to observe [Onmyouji Monthly

Magazine], but he got played by the other party, it was because I wasn't careful enough, I'm sorry."

Kurahashi spoke slowly, lowering his head towards Takiko as an apology. At this point in time, only Takiko and Akino is sitting on the sofa, the adults were standing in a row in front of them, this minor detail is also one of the reasons Akiko is feeling uneasy.

"If we were to look into this, we, who judged that there wasn't a need to deal with the Editorial Department as a priority holds responsibility as well. However, with regards to this matter, the most formidable person that did not let go of any opportunity is Amami, his choice of using [Onmyouji Monthly Magazine] as the channel for the exposition, I think it wasn't just a coincidence."

"... Could it be that the missing reporter mentioned earlier made contact with Amami?"

"It is unclear if she had made direct contact with Amami, however, regardless of the mode, it can be seen as two strings connected together."

Yashamaru spoke calmly, the materialised shikigami stepped on the ground so hard till the soles of his shoes are giving out sounds, as he strolls around the hall. The sight behind the monocle wasn't focused, as he was exchanging words with the surroundings, surely there were many thoughts flowing in his mind.

"Um." Satake shrugged. "Let's forget what has happened, more importantly is how are we going to handle this subsequently. The media is already coming to my side for details, the higher ups of the party has also asked me over for questioning. To be honest, I spent great efforts to make it here... Oh yes, is it the same for Kurahashi Chief— moreover, the situation on your side is worse than mine, wasn't it? Is it alright to leave the agency at this time?"

"It is precisely this kind of situation, I must make my way here, it is a must to be careful and correctly confirm each other's intentions first at this kind of time."

"Haha, you are right. If we don't deal with this the right way now, it

could develop into adding oil on fire. Most important thing is to remain calm, use the most appropriate countermeasure in a determined manner, and persist to the end.”

Satake extended his right hand, placing his left hand in front of his chest, revealing a friendly smile.

Even though the actions were generous, but in the eyes of Akino they are exaggerated and hypocritical. Just that thinking from his dangerous situation, this kind of [light] attitude is actually frightening. Rather than saying he is underestimating the seriousness of the situation, it would be better to say that he gives off an aura that seems to say things would be still interesting even if the plan fails.

“The other party do not have any evidence now, right? In the end, we will be the ones achieving victory, as for this matter we shall put it off for now, I know very well how to deal with this kind of crisis.” Satake clapped his hands lightly as he speaks.

“The most important thing is no matter what happens, the day of the ritual is tomorrow right? Uncle, you say that the other party did not miss on any opportunity, but the move Amami Chief made this time is too roundabout. He is too fixated on attacking from the front, not knowing how uninterested [common people] are regarding politics, I think there is no need to be concern about them.”

“... You are mistaken.”

Satake gave a shallow smile after finish speaking, his uncle— the shikigami whose name was Dairenji Shidou suddenly stopped in his tracks, placing his hand on his chin.

“Amami taking action openly after hiding for so long, it is very hard to imagine he had [only this move] in his pocket, it’s a pity we have no way to know, but he definitely had prepared his next move.”

Yashamaru concluded, his tone seems to convey that this is something for sure. “The next move huh.” Satake repeated this sentence with a mocking tone, he seems to be enjoying himself. “What kind of move would he make?”

“Didn’t I say that there is no way of knowing, Masumi? However, Kurahashi agrees with my views, right? Since there is no mention about it in the video, for sure Amami did not get hold of the relevant evidence, but he dared to use that kind of method, this is enough to proof that he had already prepare his next move. Am I right?”

“... I feel the same way, this is the most reasonable explanation.”

In face of his old friend’s somewhat pestering questions, Kurahashi remain composed, firmly answered his questions. After hearing the Onmyou Agency Chief’s swift replies, Satake can only shrug his shoulders in silence. This moment, “... Because of the lack in time, deciding to bet for the last time... this is possible, right?” The one who spoke was behind Takiko— standing by behind the sofa, Kumomaru.

“Of course, there is that side of things.” Yashamaru answered. “However, that old man no matter how low the possibility is, he surely chooses the method that has [winning chance]. Even time is tight, if there is no chance of winning, he definitely won’t take action. Perhaps, until the very last moments, he will still be thinking about what to do would be the best choice, he can be said to be the person with the least luck with [abandoning oneself to despair]. In that case, he surely had some plans... but, what will he do...”

After finish answering Kumomaru’s question, Yashamaru started muttering to himself. Yashamaru—Dairenji Shidou thinks that Amami is extremely well versed in the techniques of tactics, and he is executing a plan that is unimaginable right now.

Akino only held her breath, watching these adults having discussion, A quite surprising thought emerged from her heart.

-- So, this is how it is...

Akiko thought the attitudes of the bad guys would be more leisure. Using various ploys, fully prepared to commit evil— So cracks will appear on the places where they are careless.

But the adults in front of her, other than Satake, every one of them are strict. They hold enormous power in their hands, and victory is

on sight, yet they still did not relax.

Every one of them were [serious], it is precisely because of that, there is no way to easily beat them. Compared to a detailed explanation, she had personally experienced this very fact— It is so difficult to win against them.

It is different from a Magic Battle, but it is still a [battle].

“... Kurahashi. How are things going in the Agency?”

“Chaos is constantly spreading.”

“I see... It would seem that the other party wants to destroy Onmyou Agency. Could you stabilise the situation in the Agency, especially [The Twelve Divine Generals].”

“Wait a minute, to stabilise the situation in the Agency, ignoring that allegation would be ineffective, right? As a higher up, how are you planning to explain this?”

“To the Agency, I could only explain that this is a defamation without evidence, it is highly possible that there was some manipulation of magic related information, conversely, I would ask them to be on alert. To the public, I would express that I am preparing to give a proper explanation, and then give a vague explanation of what is going on, doing this should give ourselves enough time.”

“Um... As long as we capture the other party afterwards, it doesn't matter what form it takes, doing this is actually a better suited method. As for the media, just leave it to me.”

Satake nodded in agreement, it's just that Yashamaru seems to be still thinking about something, he sternly stared into space. “Uncle?” Even when Satake called out to him, he did not respond as well.

Satake helplessly smiled bitterly towards Kurahashi, just as Kurahashi wanted to say something to Yashamaru— **“Compared to this thing.”** Takiko said.

Akino's body shook.

Wrong, not just Akino. Kurahashi, Satake, Yashamaru and Kumomaru gave their attention to Takiko at the same time. During this discussion, this is the first time Takiko begin to speak.

“The most important is **Harutora**, he is finally willing to face us.”

Takiko smiled beautifully, totally disregarding the discussion the adults had just now. She glanced to the Akino at the side, “Right?” intimately seeking her agreement. Of course, Akiko did not have the strength to answer, to have someone seeking agreement suddenly just as she relaxes— Moreover it was for something that she does not understand, “Eh? W... What?” She simply panicked.

“... Princess?” Satake called, sounding seemingly to be testing the other party’s reaction. As expected, Takiko did not respond at all. “... Yep.” Yashamaru responded instead.

“That’s right, whether it is victory or defeat will depend on tomorrow... This is not the time to be concerned with the public.”

Then, Yashamaru in turn looked at Kurahashi, Satake and Kumomaru.

“Let’s be **perfectly** prepared, we must not fail.”

## Part 4

In the end, it was busy till the night.

After the emergency repairs to the permanent barrier of the Shinjuku Branch, it was tidying up reports next, after that was the confirmation and notification of various items regarding the spiritual disaster terror attack tomorrow. By the time when it finally seems to be a good time to take a break, spiritual disasters started happening continuously, there is no rest with all the exorcism work.

-- The amount of spiritual disasters happening these days is indeed increasing.

Even though there is no concrete evidence, Yuge had this feeling of inclination ever since the level four spiritual disaster in Ogikubo. What if it is like the rumours say, that level four spiritual disaster is the forewarning of the spiritual disaster terrorist attack. If that was true, the scale of this when it is [officially launched] will be perhaps greater than the previous two spiritual disaster terrorist attack, furthermore, it could develop into the Great Spiritual Disaster in the past— the Great Spiritual Disaster that Tsuchimikadou Yakou caused before the end of war— A similar scale of terror attack, this is truly something frightening.

It is a must to stop this spiritual disaster terror attack, the stronger this thinking is, the stronger the sense of crisis will be, the higher increase in the proportion of the video will be in the heart.

The thing that makes her mad is that, in this situation, she still could not contact Miyachi.

During the afternoon, the upper echelons of the Onmyou Agency informed every member in the Agency, that exposition report by [Onmyou Monthly Magazine] is totally baseless. That said, it is a matter of fact that the upper echelons will react this way. Due to the contents being too absurd, they will not give a public response at the moment, however, looking at the situation, Onmyou Agency will give an official announcement and they are preparing at the moment, the



most important thing right now is to put in all the efforts into preparations for the spiritual disaster terror attack tomorrow— these were the main contents of the directive.

It's just that this directive isn't given by her superior Miyachi.

It was said that Miyachi was summoned by the Agency Chief, he is in the building, but Yuge could not understand why he could not pick up his phone for the entire day, she felt that the other party is cutting off contact with her on purpose.

-- The reason he was summoned by the Agency Chief must be due to the exposition...

Regrettably, there was no chance for her to speak to Shigeoka at the Shinjuku Branch. After returning to the Exorcist Bureau Headquarters, Yuge used the time when she finally can sit down to have a meal, to send a reply message to the twin sisters. It was already after 9pm, the twins are on 24 hours standby in the main branch. The reply came quickly, it must be that they were waiting for Yuge to contact them as well. Yuge immediately make her way over to the office where the twins are.

The office of the twins is situated at the topmost floor of the Exorcist Bureau—more accurately, it is the penthouse of the roof. To say this place is an office, it is closer to say this is the twin's [house]. As they are the Special Spirit Sensors that needs to observe the whole city's aura at any time, the twins are in a situation where they have to live in the Exorcist Bureau.

Yuge took the lift all the way to the top floor.

There is a corridor after exiting the lift, there is a glass door ahead that leads to the roof, behind it is the entrance to the twins' office. Yuge walked along the corridor and knocked on the front door of the office.

“Byakuran, Kurogiku, it's me, Mari.”

Footsteps could be heard immediately behind the door.

The door was opened from the inside, a lady stuck her head out. Even

though she was unable to differentiate at the moment, but looking at their favourite flounced dress and the flower accessory on her curly hair, it was all white, it can be said this is the elder sister, Byakuran.

“Mari! you are so slow, we have waited for you for a long time.”

“I’m sorry, I was too busy, Kurogiku, she--”

“I’m here. Good evening, Mari.”

Another lady’s face stuck out behind the elder sister. That person looks exactly like the elder sister, the way she dressed is similar in style as well, just that the colour is different. Her dress and hair accessory were all black in colour, she is the younger sister of the twin, Kurogiku.

“Now, now, quickly come in.”

“We really waited for a long time.”

“However, it is very good that there is still red tea left.”

“Really, Onee-san, now is not the time to be concerned with such things, right?”

The twins exchanged words while pulling Yuge’s hand, bringing her indoors. Compared to the usual carefree attitudes of the twins, they are quite anxious right now.

The decorations in the office completely shows the interest of the twins, it is filled with gorgeous western styles. Flowery pattern wallpaper complementing with a deep coloured carpet, classic style tables and chairs are placed in the room, the entire room gives off an impression of a relaxing hotel room. This place had become their private space, they probably had received permission, they even use their own money to decorate this place. Even though this is probably too much, but till now there is no one criticising their actions.

Yuge had been to the twins’ office for several times, she is very familiar to this place. Yet, this time, she jumped after entering the room, there were people who arrived before her.

“Spec, Special Spirit Sensor Miyoshi? Yamashiro as well?”

“... It’s been a long time, Independent Officer.”

“Yuge, it’s been some time since I’m not a Special Spirit Sensor, I am a Magic Investigator now, **at least for now.**”

Yuge can’t help but widen her eyes, in the twins’ office were Miyoshi Tougo and Yamashiro Hayato.

Miyoshi was sitting on the chair, elegantly enjoying the red tea, Yamashiro was standing while having a very stern expression. They were only noticed after entering the room, as if it is due to Yamashiro and Miyoshi casted invisibility together. After Yuge entered the room, the invisibility became partially undone, however, they maintain a heavy suppression of their auras so that outsiders would not notice them.

Coincidentally, the three of them that visited the Seishuku Temple before had gathered once again, the three of them had not met up ever since that time.

There is another person in the room, an unfamiliar lady. After seeing Yuge, she stood up from her chair immediately and gave a bow. Yuge gave her regards through her expression in her eyes, but her heart is filled with doubts.

“How, how did the two of you end up here... Who is this person? We haven’t met each other before... right?”

“No. Actually we had an interview before, but during that time it wasn’t just me alone.”

“What?”

After the lady responded fearfully, a questioning look appeared on Yuge’s face for a moment, then she had a shocking realisation.

-- Could it be [Onmyouji Monthly Magazine]?

In order to look for an explanation, after she turned her head over anxiously, “It was Miyoshi-san who contacted us.” Byakuran said

without a care.

“We too, had finished listening to the explanation of Miyoshi-san before calling you. Anyway, please take a seat first, I will pour you a cup of black tea now... Ah ah, but the black tea has got cold, I should make another...”

“Forget about the black tea, what exactly is going on now!”

“What? Those are high quality tea leaves you know, it is formulated at the shop that I frequently visit--”

“Onee-san, let’s talk about the black tea at a later time. If Mari doesn’t know what is going on, she would not be able to calm down.”

Kurogiku pacify the angry Byakuran, that kind of slow pace is exactly the same as her elder sister. Yuge decided to ignore those two, she faced Miyoshi and slapped both her hands on the table.

“What is going on, Miyoshi-san? Why are you here with Yamashiro? Is that person perhaps a reporter from [Onmyouji Monthly Magazine]? Besides, aren’t you guys should be searching for Tsuchimikado Harutora--”

After speaking without stop to this point, Yuge remembered another important thing.

“Wait a minute! Where is Kogure-senpai? You two are in the same team with Kogure-senpai now, right? Is senpai not here?”

After she questioned pressingly, Miyoshi shifted his body to face Yuge who bent her body forward, he then calmly raised the tea cup on his right hand, bringing the cup to his lips and began enjoying the black tea, after that he returned the tea cup on to the saucer on his left hand. Yuge nearly flipped the table, but she remembered he is always like this. For some reason, all the Special Spirit Sensors have such carefree attitudes.

Yuge couldn’t hold herself back any longer, right before she began to shout angrily, “Kogure has fell into the hands of Kurahashi Chief.” Miyoshi calmly said.

That was a shortened sentence, but that sentence has hinted on many things.

Yuge had forgot about the anger she felt before, her body froze.

“It is fortunate that he is still alive, right?”

Miyoshi turned his head back, towards the lady for confirmation, it's just that the person who answered wasn't her.

“Garr! If Zenjirou died, Dasai would know! Zenjirou is still alive! Definitely not dead!”

A shikigami transformed into physical form on the lady's head, it is a Karasutengu. Yuge is very familiar with that shikigami. It is one of them-- out of the four Karasutengu that Kogure uses.

“.....”

Her blank mind, logically and instinctively able to understand what is going on, it's just that her feelings couldn't keep up.

Yuge stood rooted to the ground, speechless, the twins seem very worried about her, Yamashiro on the other hand, gave a sharp gaze of observation.

At this moment, Miyoshi took another sip of black tea.

“Yuge, I know you are very tired, you could just accompany us for a short while. However, the things we are going to talk about next is not just going to be deep, it is very **heavy** as well, you should accept Kadei's goodwill, have a cup of black tea.”

“.....”

“Yuge?”

After a moment of silence, Yuge relaxed her whole body, letting out a deep breath. Next, she extended her hands— embarrassingly, her hands actually trembled slightly— pulling a chair over from the side and sat in on it.

“... Please get me a cup of black tea.”

Miyoshi nodded, using his eyes to give Byakuran a sign. “I shall go now.” Byakuran left the room to prepare the black tea.

“Wakamiya, I shall leave it to you.”

Under the prompting from Miyoshi, the lady— Wakamiya reintroduced herself. As expected, she really is a [Monthly Onmyouji Magazine] reporter. It was fortunate that Kogure sent his shikigami Dasai to guard her, she is then able to make contact with Miyoshi and the rest.

After that...

Miyoshi was right, the things that were discussed after that were indeed deep and heavy.

After Wakamiya finished, Yamashiro continued explaining the information they have received. Yuge asked quite a few questions as she listened on, however, she was exhausted to ask any more questions after that. As the tea turned cold before they were able to finish, new cups of warm tea were served, the whole explanation finally ended as the new cups of warm tea started to turn cold.

“.....”

A sense of loss should be the way to describe this situation. If only Wakamiya explained, she would surely not take it seriously, she even half doubted the words of Miyoshi and Yamashiro, to the point which she actually saw Dasai there, her heart still tried to resist herself from accepting their explanation.

Yet, these allegations fit together, moreover, after watching that video of Amami, she could not think of any words of rebuttal.

Miyoshi and the rest admitted as well, they do not have evidence.

However, it is not overemphasised to say this is a [other than evidence, everything has been gathered] situation.

-- How did it turned out to be like this...

She has no words to say.

Just—

Yuge did not realise, until this stage, she is still avoiding [a certain truth].

“I am well aware of how you are feeling right now, Mari, you must be in a big shock now.”

“When we first heard about this, we were panicking as well, because this is really something very serious.”

The twins, at each side of Yuge, comforted the pale looking Yuge. Even though she knows the sympathy and the resonance of the voices were from the bottom of their hearts, they did not reach Yuge’s heart. Yamashiro carried on using a sharp gaze observing Yuge’s reaction, Miyoshi is expressionless, but this is a rare occasion where he chose his words carefully.

“... Yuge, we are running out of time. To be honest, we are spending more than expected time to convince you. But, even if Shigeoka had heard about those things just now, perhaps he would not easily take action without concrete evidence. As for Kagami, it is hard to predict what action he would take. Because of this, for our [battle prowess], we hope that we could at least convince you to stand on our side.”

Miyoshi’s tone was calm, his words contain an unusual hint of anger once in a while. In this undisturbed agitation, Yuge slightly regained her energy.

Just—

“We have to take action immediately, I am very sorry, but could you lend us your support?”

Miyoshi looked directly at Yuge, extending his request to her.

-- Indeed...

It’s hard to say if Shigeoka would agree to help, in the worst case, he might even capture them on the spot. A man must be perfectly open

in all his actions, this is Shigeoka's way of living.

On the other hand, even if Kagami agreed to help them, he would not obey their instructions in such a situation. He would perhaps take action according to his own judgement, and the actions he takes will surely result in the situation becoming more chaotic, developing into an unrecoverable scenario.

**However—**

“Wa... Wait a minute.”

Yuge couldn't bear to speak, her facial muscles helplessly became numb and she didn't know why she nearly burst out laughing.

“There is another person... What about **Chief**? There is still **Chief Miyachi**, right? In order to stop Chief Kurahashi's plans, chief's powers are necessary. Moreover, before convincing me, shouldn't you all be discussing this with chief first? Chief will surely... Because...”

The events of that night when the Onmyou Agency building came under attack flashed past her mind. When Yuge was up against Ashiya Doman, right before she fell into despair, Miyachi arrived and swept away the despair as if it was nothing. Even though he is an undisciplined and wilful good for nothing, and he upholds secrets, a chief that makes people unhappy, yet, as long as he is in charge, regardless of what kind of spiritual disaster, no matter what kind of magic battles, Yuge will be able to gather up courage.

Due to taking things for granted, this caused her to not notice of this fact in her everyday life.

Not just Yuge, the absolute peace of mind of having Miyachi behind the back has deeply carved into the bones of every exorcist. There will be no problems as long as Miyachi is around, this kind of overpowering trust, has even turned into a belief in the hearts of every one of the Exorcist Bureau.

Every time Yuge is on duty, she would have a goal of [not letting him take the trouble to go into action].

Even though she would never tell him about this, but in fact, she



secretly takes pride in [being recognised] as an Independent Officer by him and also [receiving assignments from him] as his subordinate.

Yet—

“Yuge, regrettably—”

“Miyachi Chief and Kurahashi Chief are partners.”

Miyoshi’s tone remained calm, but Yamashiro who stood behind, interrupted him, his tone is like a knife cutting down mercilessly.

“Looking at the situation before, it is hard to imagine that he doesn’t know the hidden side of chief—accurately speaking, the chances of it is near zero. That person is chief’s centaur.” Yamashiro interrupted in such a way.

Yuge bit her lips.

“.....”

She took out her phone without speaking, Yamashiro’s expression turned grim, he took a step forward immediately. Miyoshi raised his hand, stopping Yamashiro who wanted to cast magic.

Under the observation of the twins and Wakamiya, Yuge pressed the buttons on her phone with determination. She dialled the number of Miyachi, Karasutengu Dasai is flying near the ceiling with an anxious expression. The usual sounds of the phone can be heard in this tensed atmosphere, unfitting the situation.

No one picked up the call.

She listened listlessly at the voice recording notification coming from her phone, dejectedly putting down her hand that holds the phone, her expression is that of a corpse, her eyes gave a look like a lost child. The twins gave a comforting look towards their friend.

At this moment, “... Miyachi Chief has returned to the headquarters.” Perhaps Miyachi felt his aura, announced. “Miyoshi-san!” Yamashiro widened his eyes. Miyoshi’s expression remained unchanged, his eyes were observing the surprised Yuge.

Logic and feelings were conflicting fiercely in Yuge's heart. "Mari." Byakuran gently spoke. "You do not need to consider about us, you can temporary put aside the things regarding the Exorcist Bureau and the outside world, the most important thing is what do you want to do."

"..... I..."

Yuge gritted her teeth.

After struggling for some time, Yuge straightened herself and stood up from her seat. She gave a deep bow towards everyone, she then left the office without turning back.



"Miyoshi-san! We should stop her!"

Yamashiro shifted to the side of Miyoshi, proposing this once again. Miyoshi let of a breath, resting his back on the backrest of the chair.

"There is nothing we can do, with Yuge in that kind of condition, it is very difficult for her to become part of our battle power."

"But!"

"I know. Let us leave too... Sorry, Kadei."

"It's okay, Miyoshi-san."

"We have already prepared beforehand."

The twins are impassioned, both their hands clenched into a fist, nodding their heads at the same time. Brave— more like teenage girls with high morale in a sports competition, the look on their faces makes people smile, that said, they are seriously determined. "Garr." Dasai called out with high spirits on their heads. Even though Yamashiro unhappily spitted, but he could not say anything more.

"It is the same for Wakamiya-san as well, I shall affirm once again, do

you really want to follow us? Optimistically speaking, you have already completed your task, what comes next will be too dangerous for you.” “I am aware that I will be an hinderance, but it’s okay to not concern about me, please allow me to go with you all.”

Wakamiya replied immediately to Miyoshi who is reaffirming her and stood up after that. She is highly motivated as well, Miyoshi could not help but shake his head, while Yamashiro can’t be bothered to get angry. “Is it just me that I cannot find any motivation for this? How I wish there is someone that can replace me... everyone is so enthusiastic.”

Then, “... Oh yeah, there is one more enthusiastic person...” He spoke while looking at a distance. “What?” Yamashiro turned his head towards the same direction after detecting.

“Oh, could this be...”

“That’s right, onee-chan, it is exactly the same thing from last night.”

The twins followed Miyoshi and set their sights into the distance, Wakamiya stood rooted to the ground, one cannot blame a normal person like her to have such a reaction, moreover, even the National First-Class Onmyouji Miyoshi cannot [see] using his own power.

On the other hand, Japan’s most capable Spirit Sight— The three Special Spirit Sensors can clearly [see] the aura and the intensity of its magic.

Miyoshi let out a breath.

“The Eve Festival is starting, I wonder what kind of development will unfold during this time tomorrow.”



The security in the building increased compared to the previous night, even though this is to be expected, and they have started taking action earlier than last night, it is still unknown if this will be effective. “Anyway, the things that we need to do is still the same.”

“Yeah, let’s quickly finish things up.”

As the Onmyouji dressed in black spoke, with the accompaniment of a single arm oni, both of them casted Unmoving Golden Chains at the same time and knocked the exorcists that are guarding along the corridor unconscious.

The shikigami rushed in first, his master followed him, they have already infiltrated the premises for about 20 minutes. The intensive noises from the magic battles gradually died down, the resistance from the Branch is weakening. However, if this drags on, the exorcist teams that went to exorcise spiritual disasters will return quickly. Their mission wasn’t to attack the exorcists, in addition, in order to avoid unnecessary battles, they have to leave before it happens.

The very weak point of the Exorcist Bureau is that it has to continue its regular operations even during times of emergency. This time is the same as last night, exploiting this very weakness and launch an attack, that’s why there is a need to deliver a heavy attack in this short amount of time.

“After thinking about it, this is actually quite ironic.”

“What is it?”

“The catalyst that caused your awakening is the chaotic battle here in Meguro Branch, after you awakened, you returned to attack this location.”

“.....”

In response to the shikigami that used this topic to tease him, the black clothed Onmyouji silently adjusted the hem of his black coat. This method of low altitude flight kind of walking is possible with the assistance of [Raven’s Wing] powers to move in high speeds, moreover, as he run along the corridor, he had destroyed another barrier of a training room.

“Almost there.”

“Yes. This should be enough.”

Due to the period of time when he commutes to Meguro Branch for studies, he still clearly remembers the internal layout of the building. The two of them rushed forward, blasting away both the windows and walls of the corridors and landed in the atrium of the building.

In order to create a chaotic effect, he immediately used magic to produce smoke the moment he infiltrated the building. Now that the smoke had mostly dispersed, he can see the nostalgic view of the atrium at the end of the thin smoke. It is the same as that time, the atrium that was turned into a battlefield is filled with damage traces that is unbearable to see. Yet, what is different from that time is that, these damages were not caused by spiritual disaster but himself. The Shikigami was right, this is very ironic. The Onmyouji had a self-loathing smile for a moment, a tiny sad look flashed past his eye.

“... Let’s go.”

As he gave the order to his shikigami, he started increasing his magic power. In this windless condition, the coat he wore started to bulge lightly.

At this moment—

“You are truly admirable, Harutora.”

A voice came out from the smoke, the shikigami immediately rush in front of his master, facing off the owner of the voice. The Onmyouji temporary stopped his transformation magic and shot a gaze into the smoke. A man pushed away the fog and walked towards them.

One look and that man will give people an impression of being [ominous]. Tall and slim, wearing a pelt jacket and a pair of slim fit jeans, the jewelleries on him shine dimly in this darkness. He wore a smug on his face, his eyes were covered by the sunglasses he wears, yet one can feel the intense fiery gaze looking through the lens fixated at them. Onmyouji— Tsuchimikadou Yakou looked serious.

“... Kagami.”

The one that appeared before him is the Independent Exorcist Officer, [Ogre Eater] Kagami Reiji.

Choosing to appear at this moment, it is very Kagami-like. He had detected an attack while on the way to exorcise spiritual disasters and decided to return quickly— Of course, this is just a possibility, however, he should appear earlier as he is well versed in Far Step. He was [waiting] all along for them to destroy barriers, defeat exorcists, attacking the branch, until the moment right before they wanted to retreat. After using a lot of magic and having little time left, truly the most disadvantageous timing for them.

“I can’t believe you would appear so brazenly after yesterday night. You are aware of the exposition, right? Is this alright? Just when your comrades are taking action and here you are, doing such things these two nights.”

“.....”

Harutora decided to ignore those words of provocations, even though it is a disadvantageous moment, but their purpose of this trip has been fulfilled, what is left is to come up with a way to leave this place.

“... Kakugyouki.”

The moment the order is given, the shikigami immediately released magic powers, thick miasma begin to spread in the atrium, the remaining magical smoke form a swirl with the oni in the center.

Oni— [Oni Type] is a Third Level Dynamic Spiritual Disaster. Yet, Kakugyouki is not a normal [Oni Type] spiritual disaster. He has lived for a long thousand years, an ancient and true Oni. It’s different from a regular Third Level Spiritual Disaster, it is very difficult to eradicate even for an Independent Exorcist. Thick miasma quickly surrounded the entire area, as if only his surroundings had transformed into a demonic world. Harutora took this chance and took out a talisman, placing the talisman near his mouth, he started chanting incantations.

He was ready to use magic, but it seems that his magic powers aren’t detectable. He only used the bare minimum amount of magic power required for the spell, in addition, he transferred the magic power directly into the talisman. During this time when he is forming the

technique, chanting incantations, his right eye that wasn't covered by the eyepatch was observing Kagami's actions with full attention.

Kagami grinned.

"I never thought that being one eyed could make you more imposing, the way you are now as compared to [before], seems like two different people."

Harutora did not respond as well, his cold eye remained staring at Kagami as he continue transferring magic powers into the talisman. Kagami domineeringly laughed once again.

Kagami carried his sheathed katana on his right shoulder, that is the [Higekiri] type shikigami, Shaver. The [Higekiri] that came into contact with the miasma begin to rattle on its master's shoulder, as if a blood thirsty hungry wolf sharpening his fangs loudly.

Shaver is a mad shikigami that loves fighting, however, he is so excited this time is not just because he detected an Oni presence, but rather he got excited because of [One Armed Ogre]. The two shikigami had a long history with each other.

Kagami shifted his sight to Kakugyouki.

"Come to think of it, the first time I met you was also in Meguro Branch, I seem to remember you mentioned that you would challenge me the next time we meet? This guy wasn't in a good condition [before], would you keep your promise this time?"

"... No problem."

Unlike his master, the shikigami calmly responded to Kagami's provocation.

His sharp teeth can be seen at the side of his mouth, he spoke in a rough voice... "I will deal with you immediately." His frightening boldness seems to even tighten the night air, Kagami snickered, even his shoulders were quivering slightly.

At this moment, "Order!" Harutora added this last incantation into the talisman that he has been transferring magic powers into,

allowing the talisman on his hand— Earth type talisman, transform into a thirty centimeters long iron nail.

He threw it at his feet, shooting into the ground, magic power then flowed into the ground, the magic technique is absorbed by the spirit pulse. This is done to seal away Kagami's Far Step, setting up magical traps at nearby spirit pulses. Its effectiveness is only short term, but it is very difficult to break the magic immediately, it can be used to prevent him tracing his movements.

“—Kagami.” Harutora spoke towards Kagami. “Don't interfere, I am not in a mood to deal with you now.”

“Hmph, is this something that a person who barged into the Branch should say?”

“I am not in a mood for bullshit as well.”

“Listening to you speaking in such an imposing manner, as expected of Yakou-sama.”

Kagami looked happy, emitting a violently excited breath, it's just like his style.

It can't be helped. Harutora began a number of techniques in his mind, increasing his magic power.

There is little time left. He shall launch attacks in one go, forcing his opponent to defend himself, he will spend all his energy on escaping after his opponent show signs of weakness. His opponent is Kagami, this battle probably won't go smoothly, but he is not in a position where he can escape his predicament. Without the need of Kagami to remind him, he is fully aware the meaning of attacking the Exorcist Bureau.

The Tsunami amount of miasma from the shikigami, on top of his master's intense aura. In front of the battle-ready master and slave, Kagami kept a moment of silence, [watching] Harutora's group seriously. Without letting a sound escaping his lips, “Impressive.” His lips moved ever so slightly.

After that, “... You guys can leave.” He said suddenly. The corner of



Harutora's eye quivered.

Of course, he did not let his guard down, he could launch attacks any time, Kagami is very clear about this as well. Kagami shrugged his shoulders.

"Tomorrow is the start of war, right? You should also be making preparations now, in order to launch a final attack tomorrow."

"....."

"It will be a shame to act now."

The [Higekiri] on Kagami's shoulder moved violently in his hands, angered by his master's words. Kagami uninterestedly clicked his tongue, carelessly swing the sheathed [Higekiri] before stabbing the sword on the ground.

He then faced Harutora once again.

"What do you think? Harutora."

To be honest, Harutora thinks that there is a trap lying around. Kagami would not let go an opportunity to make himself shine so easily, if this is the usual him, even if the battle started without expectation, he would happily bare his fangs.

However, just like what Kagami announced earlier, he did not show any intention to fight. [Higekiri] is still shaking violently in protest on the ground, but his master did not take it to heart.

His doubts aren't answered yet, but more importantly, time is running out. Harutora calmly raised his right hand to his side, Kakugyouki exited his battle mode as well, retreated to his master's side.

"Enjoy yourself tomorrow."

Harutora did not reply.

Then, the moment his arm swings down, magical smoke was produced once again, swallowing the figures of both the master and

slave.

The smoke expanded before shooting quickly in all directions. Kagami reactively used his arm to shield himself from the smoke, while his eyes remain observing into the smoke.

A loud sound of wings spreading can be heard.

A black crow rushed out, tearing away the expanding smoke, flying in the night sky.

As if complimenting the elegant flapping action of the crow's wings, fluorescent powder danced in the smoke. The three-legged crow circled sharply in the air, as if being wary of the Kagami on the ground. Then, the crow spread its wings powerfully, flying into the distance, to the Tokyo night sky where the high-rise buildings adds radiance to it.

Kagami, who was left behind on the ground, continued using his sharp gaze to chase after the crow flying in the sky, until the other party's figure completely disappeared from his sight— he then began to take action as well.

## Part 5

This is the truth without any lies, he had no solution at all.

When he first realised the truth during that time.

[He] totally couldn't go against [talent].

The true master is in fact his own [talent], [he] is just a slave to the [talent]— just a mere [vessel].

That's right, he was **coincidentally** allowed to use a huge form of [phenomenon] and [talent], this is the actual truth, his existence is just a [tool] to use the [talent].

He did not notice it all along.

By the time he understood the truth, it has already robbed him of many things. At first it was self-confidence, next was his dream, then it was his ambitions and wishes. The others were his happiness, sadness and even his anger. To go into more details, even his meaning and strength to live, these were stolen from him, finally even his answer to what should he do was robbed.

Perhaps he himself realised during that time, perhaps it was during that moment, that his [self] had disappeared.

In the midst of blazing hot light.

Surrounded by sea of flames that burns wildly.



“... Um.”

Miyachi Iwao shifted his body while resting on the chair as he wakes up.

He slowly stretches his hand towards the office desk, pushing the button on his phone that was ringing the alarm notification, confirming the current time. He had taken a 20 minutes nap, his mind cleared up slightly— there was such a feeling. “Um.” Miyachi stretches himself on the chair, yawned.

Even knowing things would not go smoothly as planned, yet trouble kept on coming unexpectedly. Just having to solve difficulties continuously is already giving him a headache, it wasn't known how many days ago since he had a proper sleep. To this no longer young body, this kind of burden is really heavy.

However, this is not a problem that can be solved by worrying.

-- Hungry...

He remembered he had not taken dinner and decided to get food right away. The Exorcist Bureau Staff Canteen operates from evening till morning. Foods that would not burden the stomach... It is either Soba or Udon, he lazily stood up from his chair.

At this moment, the sound of knocking can be heard in the room.

He immediately [see] who was it and nearly let out a sigh. The person that knocked was Yuge. Miyachi's office does not have a barrier, if he had concentrated more on [seeing], he could have left before she walked over. Of course, the other party had [saw] him as well, it is impossible to act as if he wasn't in the office now. He should like act like he's sleeping, he took serious consideration about this childish idea, in the end he still gave up that thinking.

There is no need to think about the amount of calls Yuge made today, he knew she was looking for him for something. He had to put on an irritating character act again, but this couldn't be helped. He sat back onto his chair and gave a response, “Come in.”

“... Excuse me.”

Opening the door, Yuge enters the room.

The moment he saw her expression, Miyachi deeply felt that he hasn't really wake up yet.

-- Sigh, I am really becoming useless.

He did not notice when he [see] just now, Yuge she— as a National First-Class Onmyouji having passed the [Onmyou First-Class] Exam did not completely control her aura. She tried her hardest to stabilise her aura, yet she couldn't control the shaking, very chaotic.

If she only knew about the exposition, having watched that video, logically saying, she wouldn't have this kind of reaction. Judging from Yuge's character, if it is only related to that matter, she would surely think [there is something going on that I do not comprehend], or [perhaps there was some complicated reason that lead to such an unfortunate consequence], at least she would [hope to believe] the truth would be that way.

Yet, the Yuge now is positioned in a deeper location.

Looking this way, she must have [known] something, and she is disgusted, something that she couldn't tolerate or deny.

“... Chief.”

Yuge started speaking in a stiff tone, her expression is unusually strict, she doesn't have any intention of hiding anything.

“I... I have something to ask of you.”

“Um... ah ah, before that--” Miyachi gently interrupted her, smiling calmly. “I am sorry, you seem to have made many calls to me during the day, but I couldn't manage to find a right time to return your call. Any way it is regarding that matter, you called me with regards to [Onmyou Monthly Magazine] and Amami-san, right?”

Miyachi spoke leisurely, his attitude, his tone and his expression were the same as always. In comparison, “... Yes.” The nodding Yuge is extremely tensed, as if a thin string that would break with a slight pull. “To be frank, I do not understand this matter as well, why would such a thing happen... Even the Chief is bothered as well. However, tomorrow is the day of the forewarned terrorist attack, honestly now is not a good time to deal with this.”

“.....”

“Whether that video is real or not, there is no way to judge now, but that film doesn’t seem to be fabricated, that’s why it is confusing.”

“.....”

“What exactly is the [reason] for that exposition... Moreover, it is related to Amami-san, why did it [turn out this way], I really couldn’t understand. However, Amami-san is safe— at least it is relieving that he looks all right.”

Miyachi had a bothered expression and wore a bitter smile on his face. Unknowingly, his actions seem frustrated and tired. He is truly very tired, the fatigue accumulated on every cell on his body cannot be pretended, this is without question.

He looked at Yuge, he observed that the look Yuge used to look at him was shaking slightly, he realised she was swaying as she rather gave up thinking and let her mood relax slightly.

So—

“... Are you able to accept this explanation?”

His tone is cold, extremely devoid of emotions.

Yuge nearly let out a cry.

The pain of her heart being torn apart is beyond imagination. Haha, I apologise, I was just joking, Mariri— The desire for these words to be spoken was unusually strong, even she was surprised with herself. Regardless of a huge lie, or pretension that is dazzlingly exaggerated, as long as he said it, she would perhaps— even if it was for just a moment— show a salvaging and relaxing smile. In fact, deep in her heart she truly wished to hear this kind of words, even if it’s unruly, twisted, ugly like a comedy, he too would like to let her have a moment of relief.

However—

-- This could not be done...

“Childish.” Miyachi continued.

Among all the independent Exorcists, Yuge and Kagami has especially the most opportunity to be directed by Miyachi the most. He had frequently advised them on the skills of an exorcist as well as their attitude and also leading them. The two subordinates and disciples are two different types, Kagami had absorbed more of the skills, whereas Yuge had learned more about attitude.

However, the next step is to let her understand the attitude she should have not as an exorcist, but as an [Onmyouji], this is a duty that he should perform.

Miyachi slowly got up from his seat.

“If **Shigeoka** heard what I have said, even if he cannot accept it, he would still [bear with it], because this is work... If it’s **Kogure**, he wouldn’t just straight forwardly seek an [answer] from me. That is why he is determined to keep quiet about this. He tried using his own ways to find out if he could [accept it or not], because of this he had spend more than a year and a half on it. Then... That’s right, if it’s **Kagami**, he wouldn’t care if this is [acceptable], he is not someone who would take action base on this kind of standards.”

Miyachi placed both his hands on the table, with his sharp gaze he looked straight at Yuge who is frozen on the spot.

“**Why did you come here?** Don’t tell me that you did not consider **the possibility that I might be an enemy?** What if the suspicion you have is [real], **what would you do then?** I ask you, do you think you can win against me?”

Miyachi spoke harshly.

Next, he breathes in and slowly breathes out.

-- Intolerable...

He understands that this is a good quality of his subordinate Yuge, as an exorcist, this kind of display is not wrong, but as an Onmyouji, this kind of display cannot be considered as a pass, that is why Miyachi purposely provoke her.

**“Only you, only you could think of getting an answer that is acceptable to yourself from [others].”**

-- !

Yuge’s eyes were filled with tears.

Her biggest shortcoming is that she is too serious, and the level is very low— one could even say her seriousness level is [narrow and limited].

It would not be a problem if she is just a regular employee, it wouldn’t have any effect if she is an exorcist either.

Unfortunately, she is neither a regular employee nor an exorcist, she is one of [The Twelve Generals], the [Binding Princess] among all the National First-Class Onmyouji. To a Onmyouji— and as someone who has power and the responsibilities that comes with that power, this kind of narrow and limited level of seriousness could sometimes be harmful.

-- No.

Miyachi self-deprecate in his heart.

This isn’t something that is so high profile, it is just purely Miyachi being [unsatisfied], an upright Onmyouji is too boring, he would at least hope Yuge would tread towards a deeper path.

“Why.” Yuge painfully groaned, “Why did you do such a thing.” Her voice choked with emotion as tears fell.

Miyachi can’t help to smile bitterly, he imagined she would have this kind of reaction, in the end she really did.

“Yuge, if that was a second grade, that is still considered not a bad performance, but is this the right time to lose your composure?”

The next moment, Miyachi casted Unmoving Golden Chains, attacking the defenceless Yuge. “Ah.” Yuge gasped, her whole body froze. She is so vulnerable that this kind of effect could still be observed after having shown mercy.



“Because of seeking a correct answer from others... Because you **did not think before taking action**, the moment you have a situation like this you will lose control easily. Go ahead and dispel, if it’s you, you will only need a few seconds to undo it.”

“Chief!”

“What is it?”

“You, you...!”

“What are you trying to say?”

Miyachi smile bitterly once more.

What kind of method should he take, for example, continue playing the bad guy could be one of the ways. He could train Yuge with a new approach after having her experience the anger of betrayal, but this is a double edge sword. Considering her character, she might tilt towards [Yin] due to the backlash, destroying her [Yang] assets.

“Yuge.”

He used first grade spirit language to inject magic into his voice, activating it on Yuge. Due to the attack, Yuge shook a little, her body reactively goes into [on-site] battle mode. This is a trait of an excellent exorcist, sealing away personal feelings, focusing on the situation before them.

“Dispel.”

He repeated himself once more while continuously casting Unmoving Golden Chains on her.

Yuge raised her eyes, she desperately raises her magic powers under the restriction of the magic technique. With regards to Golden Chain related magic techniques, Yuge is more specialised than Miyachi, she quickly undid the magic on her body. Miyachi rearranged his thoughts once more, he slowly walked towards his office desk.

“I’m like a shikigami of the Chief, it has always been like this. Absolutely obeying my master’s orders— even though I am not that

obedient, but we had known each other for a long time. Since we have already come to this point, I have decided to follow him till the end.”

“.....”

“What do you plan to do now?” Miyachi spoke with malicious intentions. “You can also **join us** if you want.”

Yuge widened her eyes, Miyachi attentively observe his own subordinate.

No problems, Yuge had regained her normal sense of judgement.

“... This time round is a huge gamble, we do not know how the situation will develop. From an optimistic point of view, if things go well it should be **our victory**. The most important thing now is that, what will be the meaning behind our victory... or what **meaning can we get out from it.**”

Miyachi spread out his arms and relaxed his shoulders while he spoke, it has been a long time since he has spoken in such an honest manner. Even though it's selfish, but after he finished speaking, he felt a little relaxed. He originally thought that he would not suffer from hiding things, but he had hide for too long this time.

“I do not need any meaning, to be frank I do not really care about victory or defeat. I am only flowing with the current, I just do not have the intention to flow against the current only... you wouldn't understand even if I put it this way, right?”

-- Yes.”

Yuge replied straightforwardly. Very good very good— Miyachi started stroking his bread on his chin. During this period, Miyachi is still gradually increasing his magic powers, continuously casting Unmoving Golden Chains, Yuge, on the other hand, is undoing the spells with all her effort without breaking a sweat.

“How about it, Yuge? You are most welcome to join us.”

“... You want me to become a terrorist?”

The gaze towards Miyachi is still filled with disbelief.

-- Terrorist huh.

Miyachi did not argue back. Yakou's unfulfilled wish, Souma's long cherished wish, there are many ways of saying it, but in the eyes of an exorcist at least, the actions of Miyachi's group is equivalent to acts of terror, no other explanation.

"I will not force you to help."

"I refuse."

"This is really not a bad suggestion."

**"I refuse."**

"Um."

He let his body lean lightly on the side of the table, nodding in the direction of Yuge.

"For you to come looking for me here shows that you are more naïve than Kogure, however, since you are already here, you must have come prepared, you can't be panicking. I am very disappointed in you, Independent Officer Yuge Mari."

"... I shall take my leave, Chief Miyachi."

The pair of determined eyes shows great fighting spirit, Yuge answered with her head high and her chest out. Very well very well, Miyachi secretly laughed in his heart.

Even though he is this way, he still felt happy for being able to help her [regain herself]. Now then... What about this development?

"Yuge, I am sorry but you will have to stay, otherwise I won't be able to answer to Chief. Moreover, I still have things to ask you, for example, [what have you heard] and from [who] did you hear from."

"....."

“Do you understand now? Your rash actions have not only cause harm to yourself, it also harms the person that trusted you. You need to learn how to see things in a wider perspective.”

Facing the stern looking Yuge, Miyachi smiled. Next, he gathered his strength— but has adjusted so that it would not rob away consciousness— for Unmoving Golden Chains. As if electricity surged through the whole body, Yuge’s body went numb, falling onto the ground helplessly. Miyachi gave a big nod after watching, he then turns his body around, slowly reaching over his mobile phone on his desk.

In that brief moment—

“Order!”

Undoing invisibility, Yamashiro opened the main door of the office and took out a few talismans, releasing noxious fumes spreading through the whole interior. Miyachi can’t help but to be amazed, this wave of attack is much more fierce and stronger than what he expected. He nearly released flames, yet he decided it would be bad to do it, so he quickly set up a barrier, focusing on defence.

“Yamashiro?”

“Do not move!”

Noxious fumes filled the entire room, the room is filled with water element talisman magic that counters fire element.

Miyachi counted to three in his mind, he then burned down the entire room of magic with fire.

The controlled flames swallowed the office whole, producing radiating heat... and disappearing next. Just with one attack, burnt smell filled the whole interior, the burnt wall collapsed.

Yuge and Yamashiro disappeared from his sight.

-- Intolerable.

The aura that leaked before taking action— using invisibility to get

nearer, the aura that was leaked accidentally while trying to find out what is going on inside the office from outside, allowed him to guess that person was Yuge's comrade, with the objective of rescuing her away. However, he did not expect that person would be Yamashiro, because he is a disciple of the Kurahashi clan, it is unexpected that he would use this method to backstab Kurahashi.

-- That's right, perhaps that matter two days ago regarding Kogure...

Having invisibility wavered before taking action, is a mistake that a Mystical Investigator, especially a National First-Class Onmyouji should not make. Even if he was stressed about the idea of attacking [Fire Demon] Miyachi, it would still be unagreeable. In other words, Yamashiro could possibly be taking action with a confused and a panicking heart as well.

-- However, he took action with accordance to his own will, this is more commendable compared to Yuge.

No matter what, there will be other members coming here soon, he worried about what kind of excuse he should give to get past this. Sorry, I was half awake— a pity that no one would believe this kind of excuse. Miyachi laughed bitterly, yet a strange feeling of satisfaction could be felt in his heart.

“I can't stand them.”

He was shocked.

“... Miyoshi.”

From behind the door that had been blasted away, Miyoshi appeared at the doorway with a handkerchief covering his nose and mouth. He frowned deeply while looking at the interior, he then makes a step onto the burnt mat.

He faced Miyachi sideways, Miyachi sighed and said...

“It can't be that you are here to join us, right.”

“How is that possible.”

“Then why are you here, there will be people arriving here soon.”

After all, he was previously a Special Spirit Sensor, he surely would have already [seen] through Miyachi’s tricks. Miyachi turned angry from embarrassment, asking him to leave using an unrefined attitude.

In comparison, “... I always thought that you are a person that is bad in expressing yourself.” Miyoshi seems to not care about Miyachi’s attitude, spoke in his own way. “I did not expect things to exceed my imagination, and please forgive me for my harsh words, your methods are childish as well.”

“There is no need for you to interfere.”

“Before you describe someone being very naïve, I would prefer that you take a good look at yourself in the mirror before saying such things to others.”

“Spare me, please stop talking about it.”

Looking at him shaking his head with frustration while speaking, Miyoshi kept his handkerchief back into his pocket, revealing a cold smile.

“Is this alright? This is considered an act of betrayal to the Chief’s group, you know.”

“Anyway, the Chief did not have any expectation for my loyalty as well.”

“Umm..... Even after betraying The Exorcist Bureau, yet do not wish to be too heartless— This is what it is, right? Kurahashi Chief is quite pitiful, he has no choice but to have this person, not sure friend or foe placed by his side, it is complicated to have such powerful talents.”

“Do you have the right to say others?”

“I do have my ways of living... However, it is because of such ways this time, I might need to suffer for quite a bit.”

Miyoshi spoke calmly, but he definitely did not make up his mind on a whim. You are childish as well— Miyachi originally wanted to ridicule him this way, but he dropped the idea.

Miyoshi is using his ways to take responsibility, he is far more resolute and determined compared to his conflicted self.

“What are your plans?”

“I do not have any directions or strategies that I can speak of.”

“Is that so, both of our sides are troublesome eh.”

“Since both sides are [troublesome], how about you come to our side?”

“There is no way... ah ah, are you going to take the twins along with you?”

“It is fortunate that the two of them holds admiration for me.”

“What about Amami-san?”

“It’s regrettable, I have not managed to contact him yet. Oh yes, how about finding him first as a starting goal.”

“Please send him my regards once you meet him, and... Please tell him I’m sorry.”

“No problem, then—” Miyoshi straightened himself, and gave a deep bow to Miyachi. “Thank you for your care, Miyachi Chief, thank you for willing to let us go.”

“Are you ridiculing me? Forget it, I apologise for doing those things before.”

After finish speaking, [Fire Demon] and [Divine Eye] look at each other with a bitter smile. Miyoshi then turned around, leaving the office in his normal pace of walking. Miyachi was kept quiet, silently watching him off. He shook his head, then lifted his head towards the ceiling with his eyes closed.

It was another 30 seconds later before the other members arrived.



That is a closed off training area.

It is a First-Class Magic Technique training area opposite of the ruins of the old Onmyou Academy, the structure of the interior looks similar to that of those countryside citizen association or athletic association competition grounds, Kagami is sitting cross legged alone there.

Lights weren't on, the only thing that is brightening the room are the lights of the streets weakly shining through the windows. Morning hasn't arrived yet; the surroundings were filled with silence. As if merging into this kind of surroundings, Kagami closed his eyes, he relaxes his shoulders while placing his strength on his kneecaps, he straightened his back as well.

Then, "... Reiji, **what are you trying to imply with your actions just now.**" In the midst of darkness, a voice echoed.

The one speaking was Shaver, a man that wore a normal shirt with a long pants, he is abnormally tall and is slightly thin. At this point, madness was dancing in his eyes, height of fury and the changes in emotions slid of his face, revealing a cold expression. His right hand holds a long Japanese sword hanging downwards—his form [Higekiri].

"Why? We could have rushed in and started fighting, right? I don't understand you, it was good [that person was there] as well, saying something like [it will be a shame to act now], you are really unbelievable." Shaver was so angry that his voice was shaking, as he interrogates his master, Kagami. His sights weren't focused, he was near exploding of anger. The way he swings his long hair in anger is as if a lighted fuse, radiating sparks while it burns and shortens.

Shaver is a Shikigami with a form of a [sword], his natural liking is to kill enemies, for Kagami who wants to gain power, he is a perfect



partner. The only difference from that gentle looks, his wishes for [battles] is far stronger than his master, Kagami. Even though he is a very strong Shikigami, to be able to control him is no easy task.

However, "... So noisy." Kagami couldn't care less about him.

"They are indeed strong, I don't want to have any regrets, if we were to battle we should give our all."

"But—"

**"Shut up."**

He used First-Grade Spirit Language without any restraint, a lag appeared through Shaver's body, resulting in him falling onto the ground on his back. He widened his eyes in surprise, speechless and fuming with anger, he waved his arms and legs on the ground, throwing tantrum. His actions seem to be that of a stubborn child, but if a normal person was to be affected by this would surely die from it. The barrier that was set up inside the competition grounds produced severe grinding noises, it is not exaggerated to describe that a Spiritual Disaster had happened in that area.

Even so, Kagami wasn't affected by it at all.

"I have said this before, tomorrow is the day for the real battle... Or do you want to be sealed here right now."

After hearing that sentence, Shaver stopped his horseplay. Not only that he couldn't enjoy the joys of battles last time, now he still has to be locked up, he would want to avoid this kind of thing no matter what. This shows that even he is having a bad mood, he is still able to distinguish what is important, maintaining a certain level of calmness.

Moreover, it would be a problem if he couldn't remain calm now.

"— Besides, Shaver. What I have said just now was regrettably not meant for them, but **us**."

What master said made Shaver stood still, Kagami continue speaking without minding much.

“Once it starts, everyone will move at the same time. In that case, it would be a perfect scenario where no one comes and interfere like just now, even though perfect...”

Yet, it wouldn't be satisfying.

Kagami relied on his own strength climbing up, relying his natural born talents and the skills he gained from training on flexibly using his talents, including the use of flexible and brilliant strategies to complement his strengths— ability. For example, he is weaker than Ohtomo in the latter, he had always thought this way, that is why he accumulated [actual battle] experiences as for as possible. Because he wanted to become stronger, not willing to lose to those guys that he dislike.

It's just that— in the past magic battles, every time he lost or lost unexpectedly, Kagami would have an indescribable strange feeling.

The person that made him notice this is actually Touji. Kagami trained him with the level that would [annihilate] him, without caring if the other party is a student or a professional Onmyouji. He purely applied [stress] continuously that is slightly higher than the limits of what the person in front of him could handle, this method is indeed able to encourage the other party to grow, but the speed of growth Touji is expecting is very extreme. It would be impossible without the use of [annihilate first, talk later] brute method. In fact, if at any point in time Touji [falls], Kagami wouldn't be too surprised.

However, Touji managed to pull through. Even though it wouldn't be strange for him to collapse any time, but he was not knocked down in the end.

This situation can be simply described as Kagami made an erroneous judgement of Touji's limits... if that is really the case, **why** would this kind of erroneous judgement happen? **What is the area** have he neglected about Touji?

The essence of combat, to put it bluntly, is surely related to talent, technique and ability, these three factors, it is not related in any way with other things, he thought this is the correct understanding.

However, there is something that run through and yet support these essences— an existence that will uplift talent, technique and ability, Kagami finally noticed this while watching Touji struggle his hardest without giving up.

That could be stubbornness, faith, determination or persistence about [something], even though it couldn't be described with words, it could be said as the realisation of burning one's boats, the determination of not hesitating to sacrifice one's life. Without a care about anything else, willing give up [one's] life for that moment.

A strong determination— this kind of thing will only serve as a hindrance, it will blind one's eyes during combat, he originally thought this way. If he were to be concerned about this during actual combat, perhaps it would become a chain that would bind himself. Only relying on a strong determination, there is no way of influencing the battle outcome between the strong, especially during a magic battle, there is not a single battle that can be won with vigour alone.

However... what if he is to set the perspective to look further? Not limiting to in the midst of battle, there is also the attitude before battle— to be more detailed, what if he looks from his [method of living], how will that be like then?

An unwavering determination, an unswerving attitude, isn't these factors that turns into a support in one's heart during battles, transforming into [strength], in turn, making some one [strong]? Including talent, technique and ability, isn't this perhaps the key to improve these essences?

Touji had this belief, thinking back, the same kind of strength can be felt from Ohtomo and the opponent from before, Harutora, as well.

The determination to fight, even if there is a need to throw away everything.

Whether or not there is this belief, there will be differences in the process of developing into a battle, in the various kinds of battles, especially in very dangerous situations, it will turn out to have some small effect, yet, it has a big effect on winning or losing in the end.

Thinking carefully, Ohtomo did not have a great natural talent such as Kogure and himself, yet he is invincible, could the reason be he had the determination to sacrifice himself every time he battles?

Kagami possesses great natural talent, equipped with well trained, brilliant techniques and the abilities honed through battles.

However, the more fundamental question is... in fact, could it be perhaps his strength of [conviction] pales in comparison to them? Since they are very powerful, but if it really was the case of losing in terms of [the level of desperateness], causing him to be defeated... there is nothing more **frustrating** than this. If there is such a possibility, Kagami would surely unable to forgive himself.

Regardless of winning or losing, he cannot enter a fight in such circumstances.

So, "... Shaver." Kagami spoke calmly... **"Cut down my seal."**

The order from master caused the Shikigami's expression to turn blank, as if not able to comprehend his meaning.

Kagami repeated once more.

"I want you to cut down **the seal that restricts magic** placed by Kurahashi Genji."

Shaver widened his eyes in surprise this time.

There is a huge X shaped wound on Kagami's forehead that seems to be made with a knife. It isn't a normal wound, it is a seal placed on Kagami by Kurahashi. Kagami is an extremely brilliant exorcist, as well as a problematic troublemaker. He should be exiled from the agency originally, but after taking his abilities into consideration, the seal was placed on him as punishment. The seal is restricting Kagami to this moment and he even considered it to be part of himself already.

That is an original technique created by Kurahashi that is difficult to undo, other than Kurahashi himself, no one else is able to undo the technique. It was said that Ohtomo managed to [bluff] through the seal on Suzuka in the past, but that was just a temporary measure.

This seal can't be undone, the only way is to give up— was what he thought.

This kind of thinking is too naïve.

If the seal cannot be undone, then just destroy it, things are simple, isn't it?

“You... What did you want me to do...”

The effects of First-Grade Spirit Language seem to have weakened, Shaver placed both his hands on the floor, shifting his body forward, questioning his master.

“... What nonsense are you saying, Reiji, the seal has fused with you right? To only cut the seal is impossible—”

“Who said anything about cutting [only] the seal?”

“What?”

“What I want is for you to cut the seal, even if it's cutting along **with me.**”

Shaver is **actually** frightened to the point that his whole body froze, on the other hand, Kagami isn't afraid at all.

He still can remember vividly about the summer last year, the scene when Harutora's shikigami, Hishamaru, materialised before him.

During that time, in order for Hishamaru to break the seal on herself, she [disintegrated] her own spirit. She slipped through the gaps of the seal that was forcefully opened before restructuring herself. She can use such a rash method is because she is a Shikigami, on the other hand, because she is a spiritual existence, this method is a way that basically destroys her very own structure. After that, even though there wasn't any news about Hishamaru taking action together with Harutora, but the repercussion of forcefully breaking the seal during that time seem to be rather serious. Perhaps that was the reason why Harutora only brought Kakugyouki along with him these two days and did not let Hishamaru follow along.

It is impossible that Hishamaru doesn't know she would end up in an irreversible state, yet at that point of time she broke the seal without hesitation, resulting in successfully protecting her master, she could be described as [desperate] during that time.

Not just her, Harutora as well. He hasn't awakened as Yakou during that time, yet he was ready to throw away his life to protect his own shikigami. He sacrificed his left eye, protected his shikigami—Hishamaru. What he is chasing after is power, to be more powerful than anyone else.

He could give up his life for it, since those guys were able to do it, there is no reason that he can't.

“... Shaver.”

Kagami began injecting magic power into the shikigami, at the same time he adjusted his aura to equilibrium, allowing the seal that was placed on him to appear.

Just as what Shaver has mentioned, the most troublesome part of this seal is that it is half fused with the aura of that person it is placed on. To destroy this seal, it is necessary that Kagami's aura— the technique, along with his spirit to be destroyed and remove at the same time, at least to the level where the seal wouldn't be able to work as intended.

Shaver alone won't be able to handle this kind of detailed job; the master has to control certain things at his end. In other words, Kagami has to cut his own spirit with his own hands, moreover, he has to cut non-stop until the seal stop working, this method could be described as operating a magical surgery on oneself.

One wrong move would turn this into a suicide, even if it's done with the appropriate methods, he would taste hell like pain.

Even so—

“Cut.”

“... If, if we do this, it would be impossible for Reiji to come out unscathed, right?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“But...”

**“Hurry up and cut.”**

He forcefully gave the order, Shaver continued hesitating.

Then... He quickly licked his lips.

He placed his hand on the handle of the sword, pulling out [Higekiri] from the scabbard. Kagami injected magic into the blade, as if turning the white physical blade into a spiritual blade, this blade will be the operating knife for the surgery.

“Are you sure about doing this?”

“Stop nagging.”

“I’m going to start.”

“Hurry up.”

Shaver took a deep breath and raised [Higekiri]. After raising the sword, the blade did not move at all. Kagami, through his shikigami’s sight, coldly [observed] his aura and the seal technique.

Different from Hishamaru, Kagami is a human. Any hesitation would result in a mistake, a minor mistake would mean losing his life. He has to confirm the reaction of the seal, at the same time, doing detailed controls and making calm judgements, doing such things while harming his own spirit. After that... even if he completed this job with near perfection, he couldn’t remove the possibility of suffering from any magical repercussions.

Even so, Kagami is determined.

“... I’m starting...?”

Kagami did not reply Shaver’s final confirmation, Shaver thrust the blade of [Higekiri]— using the spiritual form of the blade to pierce through his master’s body.







# **Chapter 3 - The Day of Ritual**

# Part 1

Grey dawn rose from the eastern skies, gradually brightening up the entire sky. A tall tower standing in a distance basking in the morning sun, shining with sliver white radiance.

The Reien<sup>[11]</sup> welcomes dawn while being covered in thick morning fog.

This is a tranquil world belonging to the dead. Once in a while one will be able to hear chirping sounds from anxious birds, plants in slumber are awakening gradually as well.

It's been some time since he visited, nothing about this place has changed, it gives people a misconception that they had just visited the day before. Time seem to stop at the point of the first visit, making a turn at the same junction, just like before, only realising he was walking in the wrong direction after some time, smiling bitterly while making his way back to the junction, walking towards another direction.

Then, Ohtomo Jin arrived before her grave.

“... How are you? Sensei...”

Knock, his cane and artificial limb knocked lightly, Ohtomo steadily make way towards the grave.

That is the teacher when he was studying in Onmyou Academy, Wakamiya Eri's grave.

“I have mention this before, right? It wasn't long ago that I'm like sensei being a lecturer in Onmyou Academy, moreover, it wasn't long ago that I heard your name from one of the students in the class that I'm tutoring.”

Ohtomo looks calm, he then started chatting with his past mentor.

“Sensei, you have been gone for so long, yet, to hear your name from someone else— to be exact, hearing it from my own student, gave me

a fright, to be honest, I am ashamed to see you, I just wanted to see you for the last time...”

Finishing his words, Ohtomo kneel before the grave, putting his cane aside.

He took out and lit the incense, placing it on the holder, he then prayed silently with both his palms together.

At this point, he unknowingly started recalling about the past— the events when he was still a student, he wasn't anyone important during that time, yet he thought he was far more mature than anyone else. With regards to his techniques, he held strong confidence in himself, thinking that the things he knows were deeper than any other people. Even though he wasn't foolish enough to mention this around people, but to use this as the source of pride and responsibility is truly naïve and silly.

With this kind of Ohtomo, there were two friends that was always beside him.

Kogure Zenjirou and Saotome Ryou.

Kogure's great intelligence crushed Ohtomo's conceit, his inborn sense of justice and honesty brought a brand-new perspective for Ohtomo. Even his carelessness, casual and happy go lucky shortcomings, all became a reason to train Ohtomo himself as a support from the side to be careful and alert in everything.

As for Saotome, she made him realise that there isn't a mountain which is the tallest. He will realise that he had cultivated patience that allows people to unreasonably make fun of him, and feeling this kind of relationship to be carefree, is also due to her. More importantly, they made him understand that one shouldn't judge someone based on their appearance, views or demeanour on the surface, it is necessary to reach the same standard as the other party in order to have actual thoughtfulness and farsightedness.

However, these were reflections that he made after things happened.

The him at that time thought these two people by his side is a matter

of course, never once considered the meaning or value behind it.

Naturally and normally.

They never even once thought about the future, everyone was still young and inexperienced at that time, he himself is, Kogure is, at least Saotome is no exception.

“... These things don’t seem happened too long ago eh...”

Opening his eyes, Ohtomo smiled bitterly in front of his mentor.

After graduating from Onmyou Academy, the three of them joined Onmyou Agency at the same time. They kept contact with Wakamiya sensei after graduation, the [Three Crows of 36th Batch] seems to be students that have a special place in sensei’s heart. From then on, they should have a senior and junior relationship in the society—that should be the case, but in the end, they maintained a teacher and students relationship.

The long winded Wakamiya is often the source of Ohtomo’s headaches, however, Kogure is different, in his heart, he wasn’t happy that he was still being treated as a student. He still remembered how he and Saotome met up in secret to discuss about this, fanning the flames from the side. After that an angry Kogure scolded them— but the two of them continued to be busybodies trying to patch them up. Wakamiya was kept in the dark and she continued happily watching the three of them.

Little did she expect that she was the reason that the three of them broke off.

Thinking back calmly, the three of them already had an opportunity to split. Saotome was researching about Yakou to the point of becoming strange, Kogure was so busy with his job as an exorcist, Ohtomo on the other hand was in the Mystical Investigation Department, busy dealing with the dark side of Onmyou Agency. Without knowing, the three of them weren’t as close as before, to the point that they did not send a message or made a call to each other for a few days or even a few weeks. In other words, Wakamiya’s existence became the sole factor that continue maintain the

relationship between the three.

Then, Wakamiya died.

When Wakamiya died, Saotome disappeared without anyone knowing, Kogure closed off his heart, Ohtomo became alone in the end.

He now understands, the him at that time— only he was stuck at that point of time... No, as a matter of fact, he unknowingly stopped moving forward.

Saotome went to the dark side for her goals, Kogure kept on exorcising spiritual disasters in order to fulfil his duty, Ohtomo, in order to find out what happened, went into the static time alone, losing a leg in the end and left the Mystical Investigation Department.

He originally thought that this incident was over, but it was unknown if it is fortunate or unfortunate, that there is a continuation of it.

Until he noticed it, things had already developed into the current state. About being ashamed to face sensei, is Ohtomo's most sincere and honest words.

“And, I'm sorry. Kogure that guy seemed to have slipped up eh... but the other party did not kill him straightaway, perhaps there is still a glimmer of hope. Although I have no right to ask such a thing of you, but if that fool is still alive, please protect him. Another thing, Suzu that fellow... no, there is no need to be concerned about her, she won't die so easily eh...”

A dry, lonely and bitter laugh slipped out of his lips, Ohtomo looked at the grave.

He did not mention anything about himself, because he knows that he does not have the right to do so, also, he does not wish to ask for forgiveness from the other party for the crimes that he is about to commit.

The summer two years ago, the contract established between the demon and himself.

Next is to resolve everything before the deadline of the contract.

“... The me right now is older than sensei, yet I still couldn't become a lecturer like sensei eh. However, I do have a bunch of exceptional students eh, after all, every sensei's students weren't good students.”

Finally, Ohtomo smiled, he picked up his cane and stood up.

“— I'm leaving eh.”

After finish speaking, he left the Reien.

Knock knock, the morning Reien reverberates with a dry voice.

Leaving Wakamiya's grave, after turning through the previous junction, “... So?” a formless voice appeared beside Ohtomo.

“So, just like that you have put down everything?”

“... You really like to joke around, whether or not my heart still has any worries, it will all in the end depend on the conclusion today eh.”

He replied his Shikigami this way— the demon that is possessing himself, while walking towards the exit of the Reien. As he walked, he adjusted his mentality.

Changing the past memories into the desperate reality now.

Changing from the carefree teacher into the experienced previous Mystical Investigator.

Changing Ohtomo Jin into [Shadow], swapping out his entire body of cells, train of thought and even the aura that is surrounding his body.

Today is the day of showdown, defeat is not allowed.

“Can this be really go smoothly?”

As he listened to the laugh, Ohtomo replied very calmly.

“**Sure**, because this is where I'm **extremely well versed**.”



A small sized female entered the empty Reien quietly, her hands holding a small bouquet of flowers. That is white Chrysanthemum, the flower that is used for worship and sacrifices.

Perhaps due to not visiting for a long time, she kept looking left and right, seemingly trying to confirm the location. Then, she finally found the grave that she is looking for, once she is in front of the grave, she was shock frozen, stopping in her tracks.

The incense holder in front of the grave is holding incense.

The incense is left with less than half its length, but the incense is still burning with a thin smoke.

She immediately turned over, "... Jin." Calling out this name.

Of course, there was no reply. She held the bouquet in front of her chest, for a while she attentively listened to the surroundings, trying to pick up knocking sounds of someone walking.

Then, she let out a breath, shaking her head, facing the grave once again. She knelt down in front of the grave, putting her palms together after offering the bouquet of flowers, lowering her head in silence.

She kept her head lowered, far more longer than the previous visitor.



## Part 2

Morning came as usual on the fated day.

During last night, after one hour into the brand-new day, Natsume and the others decided to rest after confirming there isn't any significant changes. The day of showdown has arrived, they need to rest, it was not just about recovering their strength, it was also to recover their magic powers as well. Especially Natsume having a very unstable aura, she need to adjust her body to the best condition as possible.

They woke up on the next day 9am of the 3rd of March.

There seems to be a lot of Spiritual Disasters happening before dawn, however there isn't any signs of a large-scale ritual being done. They requested Suisen to wake them up immediately if there are any movements. It seems like the time of the ritual will be the same as what Amami predicted, around sunset.

While Natsume and the rest were resting, Kobayashi continued periodically contacting them, he seems to not have a good night sleep. [The Onmyou Monthly Magazine] editorial department continued to be in an uproar as if they hit a beehive— actually they destroyed the hive, it seems to have developed into a very serious problem that has affected the entire publishing company including the editorial department. Because of this, Kobayashi's actions were restricted, however, even if he could take action, they do not have anything that requires his help.

Up to this point, the government and Onmyou Agency did not intrude, Wakamiya did not send in information as well.

That exposition has spread **widely** in the internet, finally there are news that are willing to report on this, publishing on the media. However, it was as what Natsume and the rest had worried earlier, it is only now then the society start to have highly comprehensive discussion on this.

“This should be enough to make Naota make his move, damn it, that guy...”

In spite Touji being frustrated, there wasn't any news from Naota.

Naota has explained before, to let the organisation— especially the administrative organisation to take action, it is a must to go through a set of procedures. If it is still not [in the midst of taking action], surely, they wouldn't be able to by sunset.

There is another bad news, that is after the night two days ago, Harutora once again attacked one of the exorcist bureau branches.

The location under attack this time is Meguro branch, similar previous time, there wasn't many casualties, however the timing of this attack is [after] Amami announced the exposition, leaving perhaps, the worst impression, on everyone. After hearing Harutora appeared once again, Natsume and the rest can't help and let out a scream.

“I can't believe this! What is Harutora trying to pull here!”

These words of Suzuka reflected everybody's thoughts.

By doing this, not just the society, internally, the Onmyou Agency surely would have an even worse impression. To the Agency Members that wavered after watching Amami announcing the exposition, Harutora's actions is equivalent to pitting himself as an enemy against them, especially those exorcist that were attacked in the exorcist bureau would surely see Harutora as an enemy.

It's just...

“... The movements of Exorcist Bureau aren't normal, something feels off.”

Receiving news from various sources, the person who speak of this impression is Amami. Different from Natsume and the rest, he only took a short nap.

“What do you mean?” Natsume and the rest asking him for an explanation.

“There is a group of people given gag order, to be restricting the flow of information internally in the organisation at this point of time, can be seen as there is some situation happening internally, and it is something that is disadvantageous to the higher-ups.”

Perhaps that can be used to break the opponent’s defences— or a desperate struggle.

Amami wants everyone to have their meal and wants Natsume to continue burning the Soul-forging Incense, while he continues busy gathering more information.

However—



“We should rush into Onmyou Agency! With Amami as the leader, it would be best we bring other media together as well! Things have developed into such a state, we must quickly take action.”

Touji, with a strict expression, closed in on Amami who is sitting in a wheelchair, Suzuka nods her head behind Touji, agreeing to his idea as well.

“I agree as well— Besides, now is not the time to be waiting, wasting time waiting. If we do not take our chances, surely wouldn’t be able to catch up to [Tensou Chifu Ritual].” She said angrily.

The frustration of the two of them were all written on their faces, the reason lies on the news that was broadcasted in the morning.

With regards to the exposition by [Monthly Onmyou Magazine], Onmyou Agency and Satake Masumi Member of Parliament released an official joint statement.

As for the content— Needless to say— Completely denied that exposition article. Onmyou Agency did not exclude taking necessary legal action against [Onmyou Monthly Magazine], on the other hand, they are suspecting there are terrorists behind this exposition using spells to intrude, this will be part of the investigation. However, due

to the fact that today is the forewarned terrorist attack, stopping the terrorist attack will take priority for now— something like that.

This kind of statement is the same as completely denying the advocate of Natsume and the rest.

Moreover, as Onmyou Agency released their statement, they also released footages of an unknown individual attacking Exorcist Bureau Branches continuously for the past two nights. Even though they did not announce directly, but according to witnesses' accounts, the suspect could be the very person that will launch the forewarned terrorist attack Tsuchimikado Harutora.

“Amami-san, I agree to Touji and Suzuka’s suggestion as well. If you appear directly, there will be many people in Onmyou Agency willing to listen to you!”

The most cautious person among the entire group, Tenma, seemed to have lost his patience as well, but he can’t be blamed. At the rate, Harutora will be completely treated as a terrorist, even though it is a fact that he attacked the branches, it was just nice that it could be exploited and used by the enemy.

Of course, Natsume had the same thoughts as well.

The truth about the exposition got completely denied, her best childhood friend being branded as a criminal, it’s impossible that she wouldn’t be angry. Her feeling of unwillingness is perhaps the strongest among all of them.

However, now is not the time to let anger and unwillingness to dictate their course of action, the situation in front of them doesn’t allow them to fail. Of course, Touji, Suzuka and Tenma had this kind of understanding as well, but as the deadline approaches, their anxious feelings caused them to be unable to continue waiting, only wanting to quickly take action.

Besides, it was already past noon.

-- But, even if Amami-san come forward right now, proceed to Onmyou Agency...

“Calm down, if we are to appear in this kind of situation, isn’t it the same as putting the cat near the goldfish bowl?”

Amami anticipated Natsume’s thoughts, stopping the others.

However, it has been about an hour since he used this way of explaining to make them stand down.

“Now is not the time to be concern with superficial work!”

“In fact, the other party is also not concerned about being superficial, if we just go out there to expose without thinking, the other party would just capture us without listening. Even if such methods would seem rather unnatural, easily causing suspicion from people, but as long as they have us captured, there will be no people left to stop them afterwards.”

“We can oppose them without letting them doing that. In front of the building during board daylight, I trust that they wouldn’t openly send out Yase Doji. If the opponents are Mystical Investigators or Exorcists, we wouldn’t get captured easily.”

“Stop talking nonsense, Touji. Do you want to attack those officials that we are trying to gain trust from and wanting them to come our side? Besides, the other party do not only have Yase Doji as their combat capability, the building is also the enemy’s base, it is extremely simple to capture us.”

Amami patiently stopped the frustrated Suzuka and Touji, in fact, every word Amami said were very reasonable.

-- In the end, there isn’t any chance of winning with just us.

Not just Natsume, Touji and Suzuka understands about this as well, that’s why they used roundabout methods, trying to make contact with Kogure, requesting the publisher to put up the exposition article.

-- We can’t win with only us... however...

“Just waiting helplessly here is also not a good idea, right?”

Tenma spoke with a heavy tone, his stiff face has gone pale. Amami

had nothing to refute for a moment, because what Tenma said was right.

A heavily depressing mood covered the entire living room, in order to escape that kind of mood, Natsume turned her sights to the balcony outside.

The clear skies outside the condominium was especially irony, needless to say the city itself was in high alert. Traffic got heavily controlled, there were only a few vehicles moving around. She may have overthought about it, but outside seems to be quieter than usual, maybe it was the calm before the storm.

The sunlight that was shining through the balcony was already past noon, the angle begins to slant. As the slant angle increases, it fell onto the horizon ultimately, no one could stop the movement of time.

-- Time's up.

As if a thin wire tied around the throat, the fear of the deadline approaching is as if a sharp knife being placed onto one's chest. This sharp blade is going to cut the skin next, cut the flesh of the body, reaching the organs, burying deep inside the body.

To think that [time] dependent circumstances could be something so [painful], this was the first time Natsume have learnt about it.

At this moment, Kyouko and Suisen entered the living room, everyone turned their attention towards them at the same time, Amami was no exception, in fact, his reaction was the fastest among all of them.

Needless for Kyouko to make her report, her gloomy expression already say things weren't going well.

"I'm sorry Amami-san, in the end I still did not succeed."

"... Is that so... I should be the one apologising to you, I kept forcing you with my unreasonable requests."

Amami's tone was calm, but the tone doesn't contain the usual tension.

What Amami has requested Kyouko to read was the stars of the [Twelve Divine Generals]. He guessed from the slight unusual situation at Exorcist Bureau from the previous night— The situation may be related to one of the [Twelve Divine Generals]. Even if the [Twelve Divine Generals] are important officials of Onmyou Agency, their hearts would surely waver after watching that video, causing something to happen within Exorcist Bureau yesterday, the possibility of this is very high.

The [Twelve Divine Generals] that still belong to the Exorcist Bureau are Miyachi, Shigeoka, Yuge, Kagami, as well as the Kadei twin sisters, total of six people. However, Miyachi and Kurahashi are of the same team, so in reality there is five people. The person with the highest probability that would cause a problem among these people is Kagami, but he had already known about Kurahashi's plot from Amami and Touji, it is impossible for him to waver only now after watching Amami's video or reading the exposition article.

If that's the case, the person with the highest possibility that will take action from the remaining...

“Is Yuge.”

This was the conclusion Amami arrived at.

On the other hand, this conclusion made him had a bad premonition. [Before] Yuge takes action, they were of course very welcome that she would hold a suspicious attitude towards the upper echelons. But the situation has happened— it means that Yuge had already took action, as to what kind of action would a suspicious Yuge take, surely it would be to look for her own direct superior Miyachi to discuss about it.

“Perhaps due to the target of exposition being the chief only, causing an opposite effect in the end...”

Of course, this was just a baseless conjuncture, the only thing they could do was to believe these small unusual situations inside Exorcist Bureau, noises inside the organisation that were caused by the exposition— it would be best to develop suspicion among [Twelve Divine Generals], and with all their strength, request for their

assistance.

However, this was really not an easy task.

Star reading is a relatively special talent, every [Diviner] uses different techniques. Kyouko needs to know the person's aura in depth in order to read their stars, to read a person she doesn't know well requires luck more than anything else. She has only met a few of [Twelve Divine Generals] that are remaining in Onmyou Agency, but none of them could be said is close to Kyouko.

"... There is really nothing we can do this time, if Kyouko's divination cannot be used, we surely do not have the time to slowly make contact with the party, convincing the other party to rush into Onmyou Agency together with us, this matter can only be handled by ourselves."

"Suzuka, calm down."

"The truth is in front of us, have I said anything wrong?"

Suzuka stopped hiding her inner frustration, Touji spoke in a tone that disregards any consequences...

"Amami-san, since things have come to this stage, let's just ask Kagami for assistance. That guy won't just do nothing, since things are as they are now, let's just ask him to join our side. Even if he doesn't agree straight away, as long as we suggest some sociable conditions—"

"... It is regrettable, I am unable to contact him."

"What?"

"To be honest, I tried to contact him a few times while all of you were resting, but there isn't any reply."

Amami revealed this with a heavy tone, Touji was speechless, he then turned back, "Damn." He helplessly cursed.

Everyone fell silent, avoid looking at each other, as if they really couldn't think of any more ideas.



Since things had come to this, "-- Kyouko, can I request of you to try reading the stars once more?" Natsume, who was silent before said this, everyone turned and looked at her.

Hearing Natsume's request, Kyouko's expression turned grim.

"I'm sorry Natsume-chan, I'm afraid any more divination would be..."

"I would like you to read the stars of Harutora and Ohtomo-sensei this time."

Kyouko jumped after hearing her words, the others couldn't help but look at each other.

Natsume continued to explain.

"They would surely take action today, it's just that the possibility for them to follow our directions to take action is very low, but it is possible for us to support them."

"B... But..."

"Wait a minute, Natsume. Even though I don't wish to say this, but Harutora and Ohtomo-sensei's actions most likely wouldn't take the reactions of the society into account, if they were to take action together, there will surely be people that question the authenticity of the exposition."

Tenma refuted for Kyouko, who had difficulty to say anything, "That's right." Natsume replied readily as well.

"I do agree there are such risks as well, but there is no chance of winning if we only rely on ourselves, it might be possible for things to go more smoothly if we are to compliment with their actions. Amami-san has said we have to [use reckless methods] in order to win this war, at least the methods of the both of them is unquestionably [reckless]."

Regardless of Harutora or Ohtomo, is going to defeat the enemy—Kurahashi and Souma as their final objective. Even if there is difficulty for them to work together, but there will surely be chances to support each other or to use each other. Since the two of them are

sure to move, if it's possible before things begin— even it's just a little before— predict them, it would be the best.

“There are very powerful shikigamis at Harutora and Ohtomo-sensei's side, I understand that it will be very difficult to read their stars. I know that this is a ridiculous request, but if we can understand more about the situation—”

No, even if we are not clear about the overall [situation], it will be meaningful as long as we can confirm the [existence] of the two, everyone's worry would surely lessen as well.

They are not the only people fighting, just knowing this fact can bring them strength— and courage.

“I understand.” Amami nodded, accepting her explanation. “However...” he turned to Kyouko, perhaps he was worried about Kyouko's condition after continuously star reading. Kyouko immediately felt his gaze, “It's alright.” She replied him with a determined smile.

“I understand, I shall try now. But do not place your hopes too high, because it didn't succeed previously—” For the sake of assurance, Kyouko gave such a reminder to Natsume. “Kyouko-sama.” Suisen, who was behind Kyouko, gently called out.

“How about star reading in front of everyone?”

“Eh, but...”

To specially stay in another room to star read, is for the sake of removing any distractions in the mind. Star reading is not just time consuming, the others must also allow their aura to stabilise during this period of time.

“Let's not talk about the [Twelve Divine Generals], those two have a very close relation with everyone here, right? I've heard from Miyosama, every star is interlinked with each other, perhaps being surround by everyone's stars while star reading, you will be able to find the stars of those two.”

Suisen's steady tone seems to calm down the originally tensed mood

in the room. “If that’s the case...” Kyouko continued speaking, as if she had heard something similar from Miyo in the past.

Kyouko’s [star reading] techniques were taught by Miyo, but there is a great difference between the methods they used.

Even so, “Alright, I shall try it out now.” After she agreed, she went to take the Rikujinchokuban from the room. Next, she placed the Chokuban on to the table in the living room before kneeling sitting in front of the Chokuban.

“Kyouko, what should we do?”

“It’s alright to not do anything but let me first gather my focus.”

Kyouko replied Tenma’s question, letting her sights fall on to the Chokuban. Next, she gently placed her hand on the Chokuban, staring straight on the Chokuban. However, she isn’t just looking at the Chokuban, it can be understood from the movements of her aura. The once stable aura started to shake, the movements were becoming bigger, as if dancing. As the aura danced, Kyouko slowly operated the Chokuban.

Using Chokuban for divination is fundamental of Onmyou Techniques, even though it isn’t given much attention in the [General Style], but students of Onmyou Academy were mostly taught the basic knowledge of it.

Yet, the divination taught in the academy and the one Kyouko used is apparently different. Even though this is the first time [seeing] how Kyouko star read, the intriguing difference of the aura and the usage of first-class magic fully grabbed Natsume’s attention, but this was only the beginning.

All of the sudden, Kyouko’s aura spread out, as if a huge flower bloom from a bud, her aura then began to float.

Boom, as if there is a strong wind blowing in from somewhere, the moment where Natsume unknowingly opened her eyes wide, she saw Kyouko’s body twitched greatly.

Everyone stood still, Suisen quickly supported her shoulders from the

back. “Ha ah!” Kyouko cough out a huge breath, her breathing was rather hectic.

“Kyo, Kyoko?”

“Hey, Kyoko!”

Suzuka gasped, Tenma and Touji shouted in unison from the side.

Kyouko did not once looked at them.

“... Why...”

She muttered in a loss, shifting her body on to Suisen, looking at Natsume— She couldn’t say a word due to her reaction, the frozen Natsume.

Then...

“... I, I was able to read the stars of Natsume-chan.”

“Eh, me, really?”

She probably listened to Suisen’s advice and started to read the stars of Natsume first. However, Natsume is now in a condition where she allowed Hokuto to possess her body, logically speaking, it should be very difficult to read her stars.

The people who felt disturbed wasn’t Natsume alone, Amami who is sitting in the wheelchair, bend himself forward as well.

“Kyouko, how was it? How was Harutora and Ohtomo?”

“Sor, Sorry, I’m not sure as well... I, I was looking for Harutora’s stars when I saw the stars of Natsume-chan.”

“... Is this the one mentioned before, the interlinking between stars?”

“No, but perhaps I found it due to that...”

Kyouko’s breathing gradually became normal, however her mind seems to be still in confusion, she couldn’t understand what she had read as well.

It's just...

"The star of Natsume-chan is affected by the possession of the dragon, it is impossible to read... however, because we are always together, I still can feel its existence... b, but, what I just read wasn't that kind of situation, I... Natsume-chan seems to have another star..."

"I don't know, but surely..."

Kyouko spoke while observing Natsume, Natsume speechlessly looked back at Kyouko. Kyoko's sight once again looked through Natsume, through her body and shifting the focus on to somewhere else. Kyouko's aura rose, whirling around, Natsume felt the same intriguing feeling once more, as if there is wind blowing through her own body.

Kyouko was almost losing her consciousness.

"... That's right, just like that, Natsume-chan is **waiting... always waiting...**"

Finishing her words, Kyouko suddenly returned to normal.

"Eh? I, just now I..."

Kyouko couldn't help to cover her own mouth, "Aye aye." Amami bitterly smiled— he could only smile with bitterness, then, in order for himself to calm down, he clapped the fan on his hand.

"Not just Souma, even [The Kurahashi Princess] attained séance as well, the blood bonds between these famous households is indeed..."

"A, Amami-san, what happened to me?"

"There is no need to worry, Kyouko, you should stop thinking about it. Thinking about such things is just a waste of effort, besides, we won't be forcing you anymore."

"But with only these information, there is nothing we can do."

"It was just a try anyway, I am not doubting your star reading

abilities, I do not think you have failed as well, it's just star reading [is this kind of technique]. Anyways you should rest now, understand?"

What Amami said this time is spot on, Kyouko looked at Natsume once more with her face filled with tears, but Natsume did not know how to react.

-- I have another star?

She had originally suggested this to encourage everyone, yet it ended up making everyone not knowing what kind of actions she should take due to her current condition, losing their direction. Of course, Natsume wasn't an exception, she thought of saying something, yet she can't think of anything.

However—

Just as everyone is at a loss, the wheels of destiny began to turn.

The turning of the wheels of destiny came about as vibrations, it was an incoming call, and it was Touji's mobile phone. He looked at the screen of the phone, his expression changed instantly.

He immediately picked up the call, "Father." he shouted.

Everybody's reaction was rather intense, everyone became attentive at the same time, fully focusing on Touji. That was surely a call from Naota, in other words, that was a call that would determine the destinies of Natsume and the others.

"What happened? What have you— Wh, What? Bring him over? Where to— Now? What in the world—"

Touji spoke on the phone with agitation, he then turned his head over and shouted... "Tenma! Switch on the TV now, switch to the news channel!" Tenma immediately switched on the laptop that was placed at the corner of the living room, everyone quickly rushed to Tenma's side.

Tenma operated the computer, one of the windows shows a television broadcast. Tenma switched the channels without stopping, then his

hand stopped.

Natsume's heart jumped wildly.

The screen shows Onmyou Agency Building. Express news. Live broadcast. A big group of men in suits continuously entered the building, the bottom of the screens shows the news topic, the newscaster is currently reporting on this news.

“What is it?” Amami said, his tone filled with surprise and excitement. “A forced search by the public security? He actually... mobilised the public security in just two days!”

“Wh, What? Is this something so incredible?”

“Of course! The Onmyou Agency's actions can be stopped now... I understand now, I always think in the direction of the magic world, since there is an announcement on forewarning of the terrorist attack, the public security wouldn't just sit back and do nothing. However, to start a forced search all of the sudden... It is truly thankful!”

Amami watched the live broadcast in excitement while answering Suzuka's question. Amami's excitement spread across the room, the heartbeats of Natsume and the others increased as well.

“Father, this is—”

Touji asked through the phone, yet he felt something cut immediately, it seems like the call had been cut off.

Touji turned his head towards Amami.

“Amami-san, Naota wants me to bring you to Onmyou Agency—”

“Of course, we will go now, regardless how many subordinates the Chief has, he wouldn't dare to make a move in front of public security, we now can finally pin down the chief's lifeblood.”



“... Yes, in order to let the public security take action has costed some effort, wasted some time, luckily we made it in time.”

“I really don’t know how I should thank you.”

“However, the other party seems to be quite prepared, whether the thanks are worth it or not will be determined in the next few hours.”

In the back seat of the large vehicle, due to the traffic control in the city causing very little cars on the road, the vehicle Naota is travelling on makes its way to the Headquarters of the Independent Party.

The words about wasting a lot of effort in order to let the public security take action wasn’t fake at all. Naota is only a Member of Parliament of the Opposition, even though he has a few strong connections, but it is undeniable that he used rather strong methods. After hearing what happened from Touji, Naota immediately targeted Satake and the New Defence Ministry— the close relationship between the defence ministers.

As to how to deal with First-Class Magics and the attitudes of the Onmyouji, the National Police Agency and the Defence Ministry are wrestling each other behind the scenes. Onmyou Agency gained independence from other ministries, basically is in the middle ground, the only exception is the National Police Department where they often require to work together on magical crimes and exorcising spiritual disasters. But after Satake appeared and the New People’s Party gained political power, Onmyou Agency became close quickly with the Ministry of Defence, this has caused the National Police Department to be rather anxious.

As long as he starts from this aspect, he could make the public security take action through the National Police Department, Naota had this judgement. Of course, for this to come to fruition is also due to Naota’s great abilities that comes from his long years of experience in politics.

As there isn’t enough time, Naota has to work alone. If there are no results, other than having to resign from his secretary general position, in the worst case, he might be expelled from the party. He



has decided to take his chances even if it's like this, it was after having discussed with her that he had made this decision.

In order to get her contact, compared to what he thought initially—it took way more effort than to make the public security take action. She was taken captive in the house of the seemingly evil person behind the scenes, to find out her actual situation is already very difficult, to get her contact privately while she was being captive was an even more tiresome job.

However, all these efforts were worth it.

“You have really startled me, Hall of Black Cat suddenly sent me a [notice of a new branch opening] gift box of sweets... and the box contains not just my favourite specialties, there is a mobile phone under the box as well, I immediately thought it was you.”

The other end of the call came a sound of elegant laughter.

Actually, Naota rather like sweets, Hall of Black Cat is the shop that he frequents, only during special occasions he would order the favourite Japanese pastries specialties that was designed to provide for frequent visitors, which were also his favourites.

That was when he just became a Member of Parliament. There was a rumour that she only meets the Prime Minister or high-ranking officials only, it was fortunate that Naota had a chance to have a talk with her, the gift he brought that time was the Hall of Black Cat specialties. The mysterious important person of the magic world, one word from her would shake the entire political and financial world, was so happy about the specialties Naota brought her, afterwards, as long as he made a request, she would prioritise in meeting him.

To be honest, Naota's objective isn't her [Divination], but rather her insights towards the surroundings— her high accuracy and the correctness of her opinions and fairness has made him hold high admiration for her. After that, every time he met with serious issues, he would make his way to listen to her opinions. Naota would look for her once every few years to talk, but the relationship between the two of them has already been thirty years long, moreover, Hall of Black Cat had unknowingly become a secret code between the two of

them, which was [height of a case].

“... To be frank, this issue is making me hesitant, because the Chief of Onmyou Agency isn't anyone, he is your son. To investigate his wrong doings— and it is fiendish crimes...”

“I am to blame for being a failure of a mother. However, with your intelligence, before I was in this state, you should have felt something was off, right?”

“.....”

“It was only last night that I received the specialties, no matter how great your powers are, I'm afraid it would be too late for us to take action after we have discussed everything.”

“... That would be correct.”

It was like this since last time— perhaps it's because the two of them had known each other for a long time, every time he speaks with her, Naota had no way of keeping his own pace. Moreover, he never once got frustrated because of this, this perhaps had to do with her character. Including strategizing, the political world that is filled with various love and hatred, to contact her was not just to have an increased amount of opinions before making a decision, perhaps it holds a great meaning in terms of washing the surface of the heart.

“But, the most surprising of all is that I can't believe you are the father of the student, Touji, I'm such a failure of a [Diviner].”

Normally Touji absolutely wouldn't mention about Naota at all, even though he wasn't interested in the feelings of Touji towards him, but it's impossible for him not to feel it.

That kind of Touji had begged him, without any pretentious, without hesitation, and did not show an attitude that wishes to rely on others. He really likes that kind of attitude, so he is willing to provide his full support.

“Student Touji should be taking action together with my granddaughter now, they are very good friends with each other. Naota-san, I do not have any intention of interfering with your

household matters, however please do help him this time, this is my personal request, it is not a request made from [Diviner of the Kurahashi Family] towards [Politician Naota].”

To think that there will be a day where she would request for his assistance like this, he wouldn't have imagined this during his younger days. Wrong, the him few days ago would have never imagined it as well.

He won't be able to repay the amount of favour he owed her this lifetime, however if it's Politician Naota Kouzou, he would sure disregard previous gratitude and resentments and still think that this is a right choice. But this is something personal, moreover, it's a request from his old friend, the situation is different once more.

“... How was his performance in the Academy?”

He unknowingly let his guard down, the her on the other end of the call was taken by surprise a little, didn't speak for a moment.

“He is a very reliable child, it's just that he always tries to carry everything on himself, but there is no need to worry now. There are some aspects of him that is very similar with you, but he has made more good friends than you.”

Hearing the other parties teasing tone, Naota was reminded of her character, a slight bitter smile flashed passed his lips.

He then ended the call, turning his focus towards the impending battlefield.

## Part 3

“Hama, let’s go.”

“Understood, master.”

Flying into the sky after removing the blue plastic cover, what was hidden under it was a large metal body that is similar to a heavy armoured vehicle Hummer H1. That is Tenma’s mechanical-type shikigami, Hama. Next, Suzuka came out with a few simple style—transport-type [WT2 – Flying Gulls] created by Witchcraft Corps. The Flying Gulls doesn’t seem affected by the vehicle that is over three-tonnes in weight. They pulled the Hummer up from the rooftop and place it in front of the condominium.

Suisen temporary released her entity form, Touji placed the folded wheelchair in the car boot. Tenma sat on the driver’s seat, Amami sat on the co-driver’s seat, everyone else sat behind. After everyone entered the vehicle, Hama revved its engine, raced through the streets. Originally, this large vehicle would have a hard time to manoeuvre in the city, however, due to the effects of traffic control, there are only a few vehicles now, it can increase its speed without consequence, racing towards the Onmyou Agency building.

“Faster, Four-eyes!”

“The one that is driving is Hama, not me!”

“Master, is there a need to not care about safety for now, and prioritise on getting to the destination first?”

“Wh, what do you mean?”

“... Let’s do that, Tenma. Increase the speed to the point where we are still within the limits of not getting into an accident.”

“Th, then, Hama, I will leave it to you!”

“Understood.”

Hama increased speed immediately, everyone got thrown onto the back rest of their seats. Taking advantage of having few cars on the roads, Hama did not only change lanes without a care, it did not give any regards to traffic rules too, driving at high speed on the road. Tenma screamed in despair, "Oh god!" Kyouko turned pale, Suzuka cheered in joy, Natsume only concentrated on the front of the windshield.

It is uncertain how long has it been since she could travel on the streets without caring how others look at her. After that summer night two years ago, Natsume was either hiding her movements, or just desperately trying to escape. However, the situation now is different, Natsume is now for the sake of battle— for the sake of walking towards the future after getting victory, walking forward.

-- If I could... If I could stop this ritual of Takiko's now...

The wind direction will change, it will surely change. Once it turns into a magic battle, Takiko and the others are horrifying strong opponents, however since there is public security around, magic battle will surely be their last resort, moreover, if they really use this last resort, it would equivalent to proving Amami's exposition to be true. If that's the case, the other [Twelve Divine Generals] would sure fight alongside with them, Onmyou Agency would fight against Takiko and the others— fighting alongside with Natsume and the rest.

-- The things that are happening later on will determine the outcome of the battle.

Of course, Harutora and Ohtomo should have already seen the news on how the public security did the forced investigations, now, who will take action, when and during which point in time, how will Takiko and the rest react? Takiko and the rest had Akino on their side, there are also Yasuzumi, Takahiro and Chizuru, they must save them all.

-- Hopefully they are all safe...!

Perhaps she had enough sleep, Natsume's aura had stabilized. She held her fist as if praying, observing the front.

Then—

“Reporting master, there is a simple style flying towards us, I’m guessing it’s [W1 Owl Eye], an observation technique from the Magic Investigation Department.”

“Magic Investigation Department?”

“Hmph, they are really fast.”

Amami nonchalantly looked up the sky while being beside a panicking Tenma. At the same time, the canvas behind was raised, “We have company!”, Touji, who is sitting in the passenger seat behind, shouted in the vehicle, he too had seen the blue owl flying in the sky.

Suzuka cheerfully leaned her body forward from the backseat.

“Shoot it down?”

“What nonsense, that’s the people that we are going over to convince them to join us now.”

“But, it could perhaps be a shikigami from the Kurahashi side!”

After hearing Kyouko’s opinion, “Amami-san.” Natsume spoke towards the co-driver seat.

“Open the hood, this vehicle should already be an investigation target of the Magic Investigation Department, if we are going to Onmyou Agency openly, it will be best to let the other party know you are in this vehicle now.”

“In fact, our actions now are as if we are [voluntary appearing in court for explanation], alright, let’s do this, Tenma.”

“O, Okay. Hama! Open the hood!”

“Understood, entering open hood mode.” Hama replied immediately, the canvas hood of the vehicle started to flap as it opens up, leaving the hummer with two pillars with its interior fully exposed to the outside. Sunlight shines directly down into the car from above, the

high speed swept great winds raging in the vehicle.

Amami unbuckled his seatbelt, using his arm as a support to make himself stand from the co-driver seat. His hair swayed with the wind, he smirked while staring towards the [Owl Eye] in the sky.

“Amami-san, this is a rare chance, you should wave at them with a smile on your face!”

“Shut up, Touji! You should carry on holing yourself up in the backseat quietly!”

The moment Amami turned his head towards the sky, [Owl Eye] movements seem to be erratic, rapidly changing to low altitude flight. Natsume observed the movements of the shikigami, with her hand placed on the talisman box.

After confirming the other party is indeed Amami in close range, [Owl Eye] returned back to its original altitude, slowing down while following behind the hummer.

“...Th, they did not attack us.”

Facing Tenma who was holding on to the steering wheel while looking at him, “Keh.” Amami returned back to the co-driver seat. “It looks like we are quite popular!”

Looking over, other than the shikigami from the start, another [Owl Eye] appeared, another two appeared not long after that, making it total of four [Owl Eye] following the hummer in the sky, and the number kept increasing.

“Is there any meaning in sending out so many observation types to follow one vehicle?”

“No, this shows how chaotic onsite really is.”

Observation types not only does not have attack abilities, it does not have communication abilities as well. As the name suggests, it is a special shikigami with enhanced observation capabilities, meant for observing enemies for information, in other words, if it's just to follow them, sending one will be sufficient to complete mission.

Looking at the large amount of shikigami gathering here, it could be seen as the technique users are following the hummer based on their own individual judgements—proving that the commanding technique user system is not operating normally, the forced search by the public security has caused operations of the Onmyou Agency to be paralysed.

When the building comes into sight, the amount of [Owl Eye] that were flying above the Hummer increased to more than ten. The Hummer lead the large number of blue owls, rushed into the circular carpark in front of the building.

Even though she had seen it a few times in the television, but this is the first time Natsume is in such a close distance with the Onmyou Agency building. That supposing old building, yet it is vastly spectacular compared to her impression. Her comrades had a fierce battle in this building two years ago, she had already heard about the situation a few times, this time she finally get to step into the past battlefield as well.

“Eh?” Tenma, who is in the driver’s seat, made a sound of surprised.

There were a few cars and vans stopped at the circular car way in front of the building, there were also police in helmets and shields locking down the main entrance of the building.

“The standby personnel were mobilised as well?” Amami said with a smile.

Even though forcing a search on a government organisation is something very serious, but in such a situation where there was only little time for preparation, moreover the other party is Onmyou Agency, making exceptions to many things is understandable. Onsite must be in chaos.

Looking at how the Hummer rushed in high speed, the police that placed Onmyou Agency on lockdown were shocked, “Stop!” They gave the order through a megaphone.

“Master?”



“Hama! Stop the vehicle!”

The large bodied Hummer did an emergency brake, causing it to skid sideways, a sharp screeching noise could be heard, skid marks could be seen on the asphalt road. Natsume and the rest quickly steadied themselves, looking towards the police force once more after the vehicle stopped.

After confirming the Hummer has stopped, the police in front of the building started to gather around them. Touji jumped off from the back seat, Natsume and the rest seems to reactively followed and jumped off their seats as well. “Do not move carelessly!” Amami warned. At the side of Hummer, Suisen appeared in her physical form, she took the wheelchair from Touji, she then went towards and opened the co-driver seat door.

The police raised their shields and spread out, surrounding Natsume and the rest.

Seeing how they reacted, Touji took a step forward.

“This is the previous Onmyou Agency Magical Crime Investigation Department Chief Amami Daizen, as well as his supporters! We made our way here for the exposition issue in [Onmyou Monthly Magazine] few days ago! Allow us to meet with the person-in-charge!”

Feelings of confusion started to spread among the police, it wasn’t just because of Touji’s words, it was more about his age. Even though Touji behave maturely in the group, but he is still a minor.

While the police were still undecided, a reaction came from inside of the lockdown building.

“Chief!”

“Am, Amami Chief?”

Staff members quickly came out of the building main entrance, the police that left the lockdown unguarded due to the distraction caused by the Hummer backed away. “Re, return back into the building!” Even though they stopped them in a loud voice, but it doesn’t seem to have any effects. Some of the staff members realised Suzuka is in

the group as well, “That’s [Prodigy]!” Some of them shouted.

The users that used [Owl Eye] had perhaps spread the news to everyone in the building, about Amami and the rest making their way here, behind the speechless Natsume’s group, “Aye aye.” Amami, who held on to Suisen’s hand to get on the wheelchair, cannot help to be surprised.

“It seems that this isn’t voluntary appearing in court for explanation, more like a victory parade.”

Even though it feels like witnessing first-hand how popular Amami really is, but it’s a pity that things weren’t that simple. It wasn’t just staff members that admire Amami, those staff members that were driven into a corner came as well, treating him as their last hope. In other words, the Agency is really in a mess.

Looking at this...

-- Perhaps Kurahashi Chief, he...

“You are Amami Daizen, right!”

As Natsume held feelings of ominous, a man in suit brought along a few policemen, rushed out from the building. He pushed aside those staff members to get near towards them, the police hurriedly back to the sides.

“This is Ministry of Public Security Metropolitan Police Department, we hope you will cooperate in an interrogation with regards to the exposition of the Onmyou Agency.”

“No problems, I am willing to cooperate. There is one thing I wish to ask before that, where is Kurahashi Chief right now?”

That person seems to be the person-in-charge of public security, “I do not know.” The way he answered Amami’s question was extremely strict.

“He is not in the building, we are finding out his location now.”

After hearing the man’s reply, Natsume kept a straight face, as if this

was expected. Amami looked serious, “He is actually not in the building.” He muttered to himself.

“Just wait a minute, the official announcement was made an hour ago, right?”

“I heard that it was an order made through the phone, he did not come to the agency today.”

“.....”

This unexpected information made Amami bit his lips.

At this moment, Kyouko walked over.

“May I know if the house has been checked?”

“You are?”

“I am the daughter of Kurahashi Genji.”

The man widened his eyes, “He isn’t there.” He still quickly replied her question.

“We have sent men over to the house, he isn’t there. We are now confirming with Exorcist Bureau and other bureaus, we have not found him yet.”

“So, this is how it ended up... This is the cons of having the entire commanding system concentrated in the hands of Kurahashi Chief.” Amami said coldly.

Under the current system, Kurahashi isn’t just the Agency Chief, he is the Chief of Exorcist Bureau as well as Chief of Magic Investigation Department these important key roles. Kurahashi’s will can be felt throughout the entire Onmyou Agency. On the flip side, if there was an emergency while he wasn’t around, Onmyou Agency will not be able to react well as an organisation. Especially because Kurahashi had great leadership skills, the people under him would not be able to act without orders.

Moreover, after the exposition article in [Onmyou Monthly

Magazine] and Amami's video surfaced yesterday, it couldn't be help that normal staff members were shaken. One day later, after the higher ups officially announce that they deny the exposition, it wasn't even an hour later public security came and do a forced investigation. The people onsite were at a loss, in some sense it is kind of expected that confusion will appear in the commands.

Among the all the people that are working in Onmyou Agency, those gathered here are just a small portion. Most of them are now in their respective workplace, observing carefully how will this develop. What they are most concerned with, themselves— what will such a large group of people end up in.

“... Anyways, officer, I am willing to accept interrogation, let me enter the building.”

“That was what I have planned— everyone follows as well.”

The man spoke to Natsume and the rest, “Aye, let the staff members return back to the building!” giving an order to his subordinates as the same time, he then turned and walked towards the building. Suisen pushed Amami's wheelchair, Natsume and the rest followed behind. During this period of time when they are making their way into the building, the staff members did not stop calling out to Amami, “We are in your care!” there were people who shouted that as well. If things go along with Amami's initial plans, Kogure would turn up here as well— wrong, it may not be him, if there is any current [Twelve Divine Generals] join them, perhaps Amami could return onsite.

The group quickly entered the main hall on the ground floor from the main entrance, Natsume and Touji quickly stand guarded on Amami's both sides, staying alert on their surroundings while moving.

Investigators were moving around in the hall, it was more unorganised than outside. However, once Natsume's group walked in, everyone turned their sights on them as the same time. They originally planned to set a barrier for the sake of safety, but they did not [see] anyone increased their magical powers. Even though they should not be careless, but they did not feel anything threatening.

This time, Suzuka jogged forward, “Hey.” she stood beside the man.

“— What happened to the rest of [Twelve Divine Generals]?”

“You... I remember you are Dairenji Suzuka. Speaking of which, you people have accepted interrogation, there is no need to reveal our investigation results to all of you...”

“No, you should tell us. Do not lower your guard... what comes later is actually the important part.”

The man kept his silence after hearing Amami’s words, but after a short while, “Alright.” He finally accepted their request.

“We have come to understand the situation to a certain extent as well, the only person whose location can be confirmed is in Shinjuku Branch, Shigeoka Shunsuke, we could not contact all the others.”

“You mean **all the others**?”

Amami seems as if he did not anticipate this, replied questionably. Natsume and the others looked at each other, they all were in a huge shock.

“Wh, what’s going on?”

“Amami-san guessed correctly, something happened inside.”

Tenma stuttered, Kyouko shook her head after replying, Touji and Suzuka were speechless.

Perhaps having heard their conversation, the man spoke angrily...

“We had arrested Shigeoka Shunsuke, he is undergoing interrogation now.”

“Forget about Magic Investigation Department and Miyachi, Yuge and Kagami... even the Kadei twins couldn’t be found? What is going on?”

“That is what we want to say. We already knew Onmyou Agency is a pandemonium, we are also aware that this investigation would be

challenging... but this is truly unexpected. Isn't this the time for the entire Onmyou Agency to work together to guard against terror attack? What is really going on here now?"

The man spoke angrily, his tone did not only contain hatred, it contains worry and frustration as well.

Even though it was Naota that pushed for the forced investigation at this timing, the final decision was made by public security, there is no way for them to brush this off as a simple mistake. Moreover, having met with such a baffling situation, it can't be helped that they are at a loss on what to do, hoping for just someone, that has an overall understanding of the situation— like Amami— for an explanation. As interrogating targets, he had perhaps given them exceptional attitude.

-- But really why?

It is impossible for all other [Twelve Divine Generals] to be like-minded with Kurahashi, at least even though Kagami who did not join Natsume's group, but it is impossible for him to work with Kurahashi. What really happened that is not known to Natsume and the rest?

"... Damn it, it is useless to think about it anyway, we can only use our methods to make the best of this situation."

Amami said confidently, he clapped his fan in order to change his feelings, turning his head towards the man at the side.

"So? How much do you trust me now?"

"... At least we have judged the contents of the exposition cannot be treated lightly, that is why we had this forced investigation, it's just that before we had any results, we would not give any assertions."

"Very well. We shall provide you with a direction to investigate then, go and investigate the basement of this building, there is a basement level four that cannot be accessed with the elevator, there lies a shady **dungeon**."

"Wh, what did you say?"

The man's eyes widened as Amami spoke, how to access the level 4 basement that he had been trapped in before, the man immediately ordered his subordinates to investigate. Natsume has heard about this from her comrades before, Onmyou Agency internal structure is rather complicated, it is like a maze to the outside people, there are various barriers set up in locations only known to magic users. If there is no support from a person who is knowledgeable of the Agency insides, it is impossible to carry out any investigations, that is why Amami is so anxious on rushing over to help.

"You can ask me anything, but do not let down your guard during this period when the Chief isn't found yet. With regards to the exposition, there's actually many things that hasn't been mentioned yet."

The public security seems to have temporary used a large conference room in the building as their investigation headquarters, on the way to the conference room, Amami quickly explained the collusion between Kurahashi and Souma clans, including among the missing [Twelve Divine Generals], Commander of Purification Rites Center Miyachi Chief and Kurahashi are working together. The man's expression turned stiff as he listened on.

The conference room is rather wide, police and staff members kept entering and exiting the room. Negotiation has been left to Amami, Natsume and the rest kept their attention and kept their guards up. No matter what, this is still the headquarters of the enemy's camp, even though Kurahashi isn't here, but his men could take action directly any time.

However, it was the same as when they entered the hall, there was no signs of which they will be attacked inside the building. The ones with murderous intent were all from public security, sense of insecurity could be felt from most of the staff members.

There was another thing, perhaps, not only Kurahashi, Takiko isn't here as well. This is just Natsume's instinct, however Touji and Suzuka who were in confrontation with her a few days ago would surely agree as well. The aura that Takiko gave out that time couldn't be felt at all in the entire building, of course she could have hidden in a barrier or used invisibility, but Natsume doesn't think she would do

that.

-- What is going on... I have a bad feeling about this.

The ominous feeling from her heart after hearing Kurahashi isn't in the building, that feeling expanded with the continuous meeting of unexpected situations. Another thing, while they are here, time is still continually lost. Natsume and the rest hasn't considered to have [catch up], the pain from the sharp blade known as time floated into their consciousness once more.

At the moment, a male subordinate rushed into the conference room. He walked towards the man, whispered into his ear. After hearing his report, the man turned towards Amami with a surprised look.

"We have found an unconscious man in the level four basement, we suspect he is the [Heavenly Sword] of the [Twelve Divine Generals]."

"Kogure-san?" Kyouko cried out. "Is he alive?" Amami immediately asked the other party for confirmation, the man immediately nodded his head as well.

"He is in a weak condition, but he is not in a life-threatening situation so far."

"Alright!" Tenma cheered, Touji cheered with clenched fist as well.

Amami had a satisfied smile on his face.

"Wonderful, we can finally turn the tides now."

"Wait, Wait a minute, old geezer! Even if he was being locked in the barrier, those people wouldn't just easily let go of independent officers! What if they had placed a signal on him?"

"If a signal was placed on Kogure, that would surely be an unusual technique, if they had the efforts to place a signal on him, then why would they keep him locked inside?"

Amami refuted Suzuka's worries with a determined attitude, an unwavering confidence can be seen in the old man's eyes.



“Let’s talk about the exposition, they could just place a signal on Kogure, make him come out and deny everything, all the shakiness inside the Agency would stop immediately. Even though there is possibility of his memories being sealed, but this kind of techniques only requires little effort to be undone. All we need then is for Kogure to provide his statement and we can topple down the chief in one go!”

Amami made it sound easy, clenching his fist and hit the armrest of the wheelchair. He rarely behaves in such excitement, this was all because Kogure is safe and sound, moreover, he had found his men. For Kogure to testify for the crimes of Kurahashi and the others, was the ideal plan Amami had from the start, it could be that Amami clearly saw the path of [victory] against Kurahashi right now.

Amami, after having lead Natsume and the others to this step, is so excited, his feeling had spread to all of his comrades as well. Everyone’s eyes shone brightly, they couldn’t hide their happiness.

Yet, the insecure feelings in Natsume’s heart did not disappear because of this.

“...**Why?**” she muttered, everyone turned towards her without saying anything. “Since they **left Kogure-san behind, then why** is Kurahashi not here? He surely knew if Kogure-san is found, he would lose, right? Yet, why would he do that?”

If Takiko and the others were fighting for the success of [Tensou Chifu Ritual], then Onmyou Agency would be the battlefield left to Kurahashi. For the sake of using the greatest weapon, authority, to support Takiko and the rest, this battlefield known as Onmyou Agency must be continually kept under control, not to mention they toss away their weak point, Kogure, giving up on this place.

Just as Natsume spoke about her feelings of insecurity—

“Eh, wh, what happened?”

Tenma screamed, outside of the building— it’s just nearby, an astonishing amount of magical power exploded suddenly.

After the magic power was absorbed by the ground, it flowed into the technique covered with invisibility, it then spread through the technique on the ground at one go, as if a fire spread through the ground through kerosene. The technique fully surrounded the entire building, “Oh no!” Suzuka shouted, next moment, the large-scale technique was completed, the spell activated.

A large, thick and odd shaped barrier covered the entire building, screams and shouts could be heard outside the conference room as well. Amami, whose Spirit Sight ability got sealed away, observed the reactions of Natsume and the rest, “What happened?” He asked in a harsh tone.

“Th, the building was suddenly covered in a barrier...” Kyouko replied in a shaky voice.

“This is bad! I kept on [observing] the permanent barrier of the building, but I did not caution against the outside of the building, this totally looks like Eight Formation Barrier!”

Suzuka spitted with a pale expression, “What?” Amami went speechless, all the Onmyouji in the building were taken by surprised as well.

“Damn it, don’t tell me...!”

Touji cursed as he muttered, Natsume raised her head to [see] the barrier that enveloped the building, she helplessly widened her eyes.

-- Not like this...

“We are being locked up...?”



After confirming the barrier had activated, Kumomaru raised up the hand that was placed on the asphalt road, he then stood up.

He walked out of the alley, watching how the policemen on the circular car park were in confusion. The barrier Kurahashi designed

blocked off physical interactions as well, it means to [completely] seal the building. The police force could very well perhaps have taken by surprise at how they could not enter the building due to being blocked by an invisible wall.

The strength of the barrier is near to that of the Eight Formation Barrier, and the part that is more similar to Eight Formation Barrier was spread [inside], at the same time it was turned over [outside] to spread as a twin barrier. Even though it isn't a technique that could not be broken, but it is an extremely difficult task to either break the barrier from inside or outside.

The only weakness of this barrier is that, even if large amount of magic was injected into it, it only be maintained a few hours at most. However, this few hours right now would surely be more valuable than the amount in the next few years.

This was a trap originally meant to be used against Tsuchimikado Harutora or Ashiya Doman.

“...I did not expect it to be useful now...”

This is one of Souma and Kurahashi's killing move, but now is not the time to feel sorry, they are not so optimistic to win without much difficulty.

“It was a brilliant tactic, Amami Chief, but we are the ones who have won.”

After saying these words in a low voice, Kumomaru turned and left the building.

## Part 4

The sun is setting gradually.

The sky was dyed in red-orange colour, [disaster] could be felt from this weather, perhaps it was due to the situation Akino is in now. Among the various expressions the sky displays, that's the weather that has the highest possibility to strongly shake people's hearts.

Akino and Takiko boarded the vehicle that was driven by Kumomaru, Takahiro and Chizuru still stayed at that previous location. A silently tensed atmosphere dominated in the vehicle, no one spoke. Akino isn't familiar with the geography of the city, but she didn't ask where the group is heading, she fully understands the objective of this trip.

Even though Akino is part of the Souma Clan, but she didn't expect Takiko brought her along as well even at this period of time. Trusting Akino— It doesn't seem to be that way in reality.

Before departing, she asked for the reason. "I hope you could take a look." She replied simply.

Akino and Takiko arrived at a certain shrine in the center of the city. The place where they got off the vehicle was in front of the Torii, raising her head, an inscribed board with [Kanda Shrine] written was hanged there. It seems like this is a famous shrine, but due to barriers being erected all around it to isolate people from coming in, no one can be seen visiting the shrine.

The driver, Kumomaru, got off the vehicle, "This way." Directing the two.

The road approaching the shrine was a slope. At the top, a two-storey tall shrine gate could be seen. The bronze tile roof and the scarlet pillars were dyed in the evening atmosphere, the second layer portion was four gods sculptures, the two sides of the first layer were Zuijinzo — Toyoiwama Donokami and Kushiiwama Donokami guarding the magnificent Zuijinmon<sup>[12]</sup>. Perhaps it was because there wasn't anyone around, the divine prestige of the god's territory was more

apparent, Akino couldn't help but to get goose bumps.

Under Kumomaru's lead, Takiko climbed the slope, Akino followed as well. Akino hasn't once thought of running away, since Kumomaru is around, she didn't think that she could successfully escape with her own leg muscles, moreover, she didn't want to run away. She felt that she should stay at Takiko's side now, it could very well perhaps she had been [mesmerised] by the faint divine prestige around Takiko.

The current Takiko isn't wearing her usual Onmyou Academy uniform, she is wearing a miko outfit, and it is black miko outfit at that, this kind of outfit gives people a completely different impression from her usual white uniform. Because of this black miko outfit, it adds a beautiful and coquettish elegance to her innate royalty-like noble and awe-inspiring temperament.

The sinking sun merged with the world, the black miko approaches the shrine.

Akino's group entered the Zuijinmon, entered the territory of the shrine. It wasn't sure if she had been oversensitive, the sunset seems to turn redder. There wasn't anyone to be seen paying respects in the wide temple grounds as well, however, in front of the praying hall ahead of them, there is a man in formal belt and a man in kasaya waiting for Takiko's arrival.

One of them is Kurahashi, the other that is slightly shorter, it is the first time she met him, but she could guess his identity from the moustache on his chin and the side of his lips. Even though he is wearing a priest's robe, that person should be an Onmyouji named Miyachi, she often hears Takiko and the others talking about this name.

Takiko proceeded forward, the two of them lowered their heads in respect.

"We have been waiting, please proceed this way."

Kurahashi showed the way from here on, Kumomaru returned to Takiko's side. Miyachi stood where he was, watching Akino and the rest leave.

The praying hall and the Zuijinmon are similar, their roofs were built with bronze tiles, the magnificently beautiful hall was painted in scarlet. Kurahashi turned towards the side of the praying hall, after passing through the phoenix hall proceeding towards the back of the shrine. Next, he made a hand seal in front of a seemingly normal looking outer wall, calling out... "Open."

The next moment, a metal door appeared on the wall in front of them, that door was usually hidden using magical seal. While Akino was still feeling surprised, Kurahashi opened the door as if nothing had happened and entered inside.

Behind the door was a flight of stairs leading to the basement, there isn't any light inside, but one can see a dim light source coming from the bottom of the stairs.

The Onmyouji lead the black miko into the underground, the rabbit living spirit fearfully followed behind. After going down the stairs, cracking sounds of burning woods can be heard from below. After reaching the bottom, there was another tunnel at the side, leading to a wide space. Upon arriving inside, Akiko gasped.

That was a basement, there was a burning bonfire inside, the glow of the flames lit up the entire basement, the space of the basement seems to be able to equal the space of the shrine, height wise perhaps it is as tall as the phoenix hall outside. There were pillars on the walls at uniform distance, cement was applied at about half the height of the walls, further up were rocks and soil from the outside. The ceiling only consists of a few beams, the entire architecture looks like a cavern.

At the center of the basement, an altar was set up.

That was a stone platform surrounded with Torii, a black Torii on the south, a blue Torri on the east, a red Torri on the north, a white Torri on the west.

The altar was made up of many platforms, there were many offerings placed on them, there were also a Taiko, a conch, silk, sun bell and moon bell [13] with other ritual tools and magical tools. The fire of the bonfires placed at each corner of the stone platform danced, the

glows revealed the items on the altar.

The young man sitting in the middle of the shrine stood up and turned over, "... Princess." That was Yashamaru.

"Apologises for making you wait, the preparations are finally completed."

Yashamaru stayed here all along to do final checks for the ritual, Takiko nodded to the guardian without any expression, she then walked towards the altar.

The glows from the four corners shine on the altar, making Takiko in black miko outfit look like a shadow with a form, only the red hair of hers that is brighter than the bonfires shone into the eyes.

Once Takiko stood on the altar platform, the aura of the basement immediately changed. Akino did not know how to explain this, it felt like the air that was originally in slumber woke up, filling up the entire basement— wrong, it is a huge amount of air that even this large underground space cannot contain is gradually opening its eyes...

Akino unknowingly started to hold herself with both her arms.

Yashamaru retreated to the side, Takiko took strict steps as she moves to the center of the altar.

She stood in front of the pedestal, Yashamaru revealed a smile after [seeing] her aura. It's just that due to the glow from the fires brightened his monocle, a circle seems to be missing in his smile.

Yashamaru turned towards Kumomaru.

"What about the Agency?"

"The barrier is still intact, but time is almost up."

"The barrier was already meant to be raised to a strength that can last till sunset before this, did Yuge and Miyoshi appear?"

"Not yet till now."

“Is that so, North Star King and [Shadow] not appearing is within expectation, I had originally planned to use this disturbance to catch those who left... seems like things didn’t went smoothly.”

Yashamaru spoke as if nothing happened, a smile appeared on his lips.

**Give up Onmyou Agency.** They had made such a decision, it was at that time when they found out Yuge and the rest chose to leave from Miyachi’s report yesterday.

When receiving this report, “Yamashiro left as well?” Kurahashi reaffirmed. After getting a firm answer from Miyachi, he did not say anything more. From his usual stern expression, no one could tell what he was thinking in his heart. On the other hand, Yashamaru attached extreme importance to Miyachi’s report, it felt like a strong quake appeared at the originally assumed, on certain levels, rather [stable] base.

That was why he made the decision to give up Onmyou Agency.

In fact, this decision was opposed by Satake, thinking he was too extreme. [Twelve Divine Generals] leaving together was indeed a blow, but the value of [Onmyou Agency] isn’t just revolving around them, the power and authority of it still remains as strong weapons.

The Onmyou Agency holds a rather special power in society, in an extreme way, if Onmyou Agency wants to distort facts— of course this would require thorough planning— everyone would accept their saying in the end. What other ministries cannot do, Onmyou Agency—the magic world is able to do it. As to why... it is because the issues in the magic world is only understandable by magic users, in the eyes of people that aren’t clear of the situation, Onmyou Agency’s power and authority can be used to its full effect.

This is why whether it’s the exposition from Amami, or any accusations from Yuge and the rest that have left, as long as they hold on to Onmyou Agency— even if the outside world start developing feelings of mistrust, suspicions or even hostility, all could be solved with brute force. When **everything ends**, Onmyou Agency’s existence will surely be a position of great importance.



After listening to Satake's opinion, "What Masumi said makes sense as well." Yashamaru agreed to the nephew's speech too.

"If this was before the exposition appeared, I would have made the same judgement."

"What a minute, is uncle that concerned with the exposition? Surely there is a portion of the media stir up trouble, but to be honest, that shouldn't cause any direct obstructions. Now we do not have the spare time, but if we manipulate the media later, it would be easy to settle this."

"This kind of thinking is too naïve. I did say this before, right? Since Chief Amami has come forward, there will surely be a [next move]. That man never used methods that do not cause [direct obstruction], moreover, if the [next move] connects with the leaving of Yuge and the rest, this could perhaps turn into a rather thorny situation."

A complete preparation must be done for all kinds of things, this was mentioned during yesterday noon as well. Yashamaru established the policy to not stubbornly hold control of Onmyou Agency at this time, has received Kurahashi's agreement as well. Then, at the moment they received news on public security making their move, he thought of using the barrier that is already in place in reverse to lockdown the agency.

Not just Amami and Suzuka, now that Yuge and the rest of the [Divine Twelve Generals] have left, the intervention by the administration of justice has turned their situation into something very dangerous, this proves Yashamaru's initial fears were right.

After receiving the news of Onmyou Agency being under forced investigation, it will be an ideal situation to trap everyone in one go after Amami and the rest, as well as Yuge's group rushed to Onmyou Agency. Even if things did not develop smoothly, they had originally hoped, like in the past, that by capturing Tsuchimikado Natsume and the rest, it could have an effect of luring out Harutora, in the end, this seems to turn out to be a disappointment as well.

"To disappear at this critical junction is indeed suspicious, but we have to move to the final step no matter what, there is no way to

keep up guarded.”

Yashamaru said, Kurahashi nodded heavily.

“The sun is setting soon.”

“I understand... princess?”

Making her way up to the altar, Takiko observed the sacrifices placed on the platform, silently standing there. After hearing the call from her guardian, she leisurely looked over, “Let’s start, **raise the altar up.**” She mentioned casually in a calm voice.

Yashamaru place his hand on his chest, gracefully gave a bow. Kumomaru swiftly jumped onto the altar on the stone platform.

Kurahashi made his way up to the stone platform as well, “Souma Akino, come over as well.” Akino was scared frozen by the sudden mention of her name. “Akino.” However, after Takiko called out her name, her nervousness relaxed, she hurriedly made her way up to the altar.

After making sure everyone is on the altar, Kurahashi took out a round mirror. “Is that thing going to be okay?” Yashamaru asked, “It has been strengthened.” Kurahashi answered.

“Alright, let’s put in our all.”

Yashamaru took out a talisman, threw it towards the ceiling. The talisman stuck on the ceiling, the magic inside the talisman pierce through the ground.

Then, Kurahashi held the round mirror up, he began chanting incantation.

“O’ ancient city sealed temporary, reveals itself to the world from now on— Heavenly altar seal.”

After which, aura appeared in the mirror, the Torri surrounding the altar resonated with the aura of the mirror, each producing a black, blue, red and white ray of light, finally reflecting yellow light from the mirror. Akino stood alert, the bright five coloured rays surround

the entire altar.

The five coloured rays formed a steady barrier, sealing the altar.

A few seconds later, an explosion like shock pierce through the ground, a huge quake appeared in the basement. “Yaa!” Akino screamed.

The ceiling cracked along with the noise, magma like **flames** seep into the ground. Intense lag appeared on the barrier that surrounds the altar due to the falling flames, however, most of the flames did not fall on the floor, rather, it rages mid-air, destroying and also collapsing the ceiling. Rocks and soil fell continuously, but the barrier of the altar repelled all of it.

Akino’s body shook helplessly at the shocking scene above her head, yet it couldn’t leave her sight.

Next, the floor below started to shake.

The stone platform rose up suddenly, the shock from below caused Akino to lose her balance and fell sitting on the floor. The ground swelled, it rose higher and higher after swelling. The falling flames and soil were instead repelled upwards by the barrier, all the way up — from the slumbering underground to the surface.

Akino couldn’t control herself any longer, she curled herself up while screaming, lying on the floor. She shifted her sight away from the chaotic scene surrounding her, emptying her mind, only to hope everything be over soon.

Then—

Unknowingly, **wind** blew past Akino’s **ears**. The scary situation seems to cause the appearance of her rabbit ears without her knowledge. Akino twitched her ears, raising her head timidly.

They are outside.

The view in front is the temple grounds where they had walked pass before, the two-storey high Zuijinmon could be seen. She hurriedly turned behind, the praying hall was right there. The ground between

Zuijinmon and the praying hall has collapsed, the altar and the stone platform along with the surrounding Torri had rose from below. Akino was scared speechless.

“Miyachi, great work!”

Yashamaru shouted, the man in priest robe in front of the praying hall— Miyachi nodded, and walked towards the altar.

“Are the preparations in the main hall done?”

“Yes, preparations are completed, coordination with the ceremony can be done any time.”

“Very well.”

Yashamaru broadly smiled, he was in an unusually happy mood. As for Kurahashi, he smashed the round mirror that is used for the barrier on the ground, next, a lag appeared in the barrier that survived the collapse before disappearing, the remaining aura left within the barrier drifted off at the same time as well.

The raging ancient aura from underneath mixed with the aura of the surface, a whirl is created.

The miko in black stood in the center of the whirl, silently watching sunset, “... Finally...” her lips whispered softly.

Yet, this soft whisper made Yashamaru, Kumomaru and even Kurahashi stop what they were doing, turned and looked in her direction.

Their eyes held different feelings as they watched Takiko. The truth is as she described, the moment they have been waiting for is finally here.

This is a thousand year long-cherished wish of the Souma clan, as well as a duty of the Kurahashi Clan. Their emotions were high, their goal is within reach.

At the same time, this was something extremely personally for them — the end of their plans which they had place their lives on. The

whisper of the miko made them remember this once more.

Facing various situations, a long period of time has passed.

Gaining or losing many things in the process, moving forward a step at a time.

Then, finally reaching this step. The altar they had kept hidden underground for so long is finally revealed to the world.

The long robe of Takiko swayed, she walked towards the altar placed with offerings. Even though it has been through severe shaking, the altar, as well as the offering and ritual tools on the platforms were still in their neat positions. Takiko took the round bamboo box placed in the middle of the platform, opened the lid, taking out the folded decorated paper placed inside.

That was a scroll with incantation recorded on it.

Yashamaru gave a look at Kurahashi, Kurahashi walked down from the altar after understanding his intentions, walking out in the direction outside of the Torri. “You come over as well.” Akino jumped after hearing him, clumsily walked down from the stone platform.

Miyachi stood beside Kurahashi, Kumomaru held the conch on his hands, Yashamaru moved to the front of the Taiko, taking the drum stick. After Akino walked out of the Torri, she turned back with her ears straightened, observing in full attention at Takiko on the altar.

“We shall now begin [Tensou Chifu Ritual].”

Takiko made this declaration, Yashamaru hit the drum.

Dong, the sound of the drum tears the air apart, piercing through the fiery red sky.



“Keep up the effort! Flaws has appeared in the technique.”

Under the encouragement of Suzuka, Natsume and the rest increased their magic power once more.

At the main hall on the ground level of the building, many personnel — almost all the Onmyouji in the building gathered at the main entrance. Everyone worked with each other, combining their efforts to break the barrier that is trapping them, of course Natsume, Touji, Kyouko and Tenma were among them.

“We are going to succeed! It seems that time is up for this barrier, the structure of the technique became loose, we can now rely on the accumulation of magic power to break this barrier!”

The one in command is Suzuka, Amami, whose Spirit Vision got sealed and couldn't [see] aura, was unable to handle the barrier surrounding the building, this way, the next [person with actual strength] after him belongs to the [Prodigy Child] of the [Twelve Divine Generals], Dairenji Suzuka.

Suzuka had the same seal as Amami on her as well, the difference is that her magic powers weren't fully sealed, only being limited. Moreover, Suzuka is specialized in researching [Imperial Style Onmyou Techniques], analysis of techniques can be said to be her [main job].

With that said, it is very difficult to break the barrier that is surrounding the building even with Suzuka as well. This barrier that was set by the enemy has complicatedly merged with the original permanent barrier, moreover, to increase the difficulty of undoing the spell, they had added many difficult to undo yet useless spells. Of course, this couldn't be a barrier created in a short while, surely it was before this— and it's a trap that was set long time ago.

When they finally saw a glimmer of hope, it was after they realise the strength of the barrier weakens with time, however this realisation also exposes the enemy's intention behind setting up this trap. That was to drag their time out.

-- Hurry! If we don't hurry...!

Because she was forced to be on standby for a long period, her magic

powers were rather abundant, it just that they couldn't stop being anxious. Even though she had thought of just releasing the seal and use Hokuto's dragon aura, but with so many Onmyouji combining their powers, mixing Natsume's dragon aura would just scatter the magic powers, Touji did not go into living spirit due to the same reasoning as well. Ultimately, she can only listen to Suzuka's suggestions, concentrating everyone's powers to expand the flaws of the technique.

"I had [judged the situation wrongly]." After realising they had been trapped in the Agency, Amami said this with an expression filled with regret. "I did not expect those people would give up Onmyou Agency so easily... damn it, I had underestimated their [determination]."

With regards to undoing the barrier, the current Amami couldn't help in any way, he could only pray and watch over at the side as his comrades' fights.

Regarding this, it was the same as for the public security policemen.

The public security policemen watched the large group of Onmyouji following the instructions of a young girl, their minds were rather confused. To be trapped in the building when they are doing forced investigation, it was the first time they had encounter this. Even though they were still able to exchange information with the team outside, but to break the current deadlock, they can only rely on the Onmyouji that are their investigation targets.

Looking through the glass panels and the automatic doors of the main hall on the ground level, one can [see] ripple like lag appeared on the barrier surrounding the building. Due to the many Onmyouji using their magic powers without stopping, the ceaseless lag continued shaking the barrier.

It would be a tremendous help if Kogure comes to assist, it's a pity that he hasn't regain consciousness yet. Even though his magic powers weren't sealed away, but his physical condition is extremely weak right now. The Exorcist Bureau has many specialists that specialises in aiding the recovering of magic powers, but there were none of them inside Onmyou Agency, they are now relying on a few Onmyouji taking time off to treat him with their best effort.

From the corner of Natsume's sight, Amami could be seen checking the time. Sunset is approaching very soon, Natsume felt a cramping pain in her stomach.

However, the hard work of Natsume and the rest had finally shown results.

“—We succeeded!”

The moment Suzuka cried out, different to previous in terms of scale, a lightning kind of lag passed through the barrier. The technique broke at the same time, the barrier collapsed, the magical powers injected in it spread out.

All the Onmyouji kept silent, after which they gave a tremendous cheer. “It is opened?” the public security in charge couldn't help to be excited as well.

Among all the people, the earliest to run outside was Touji, followed by Natsume.

The two of them ran out of the main entrance to the circular car park outside, the surrounding police were taken aback. The pair did not pay attention to their reactions, raising their heads looking towards the sky. Sunset. The scarlet sky was far brighter and deeper than usual, the setting sun sank behind the tower, disappearing without a trace.

“How was it! It hasn't start right!”

“Not sure! But I haven't gotten the feeling of a large-scale Spiritual Disaster yet--!”

There wasn't a way to confirm the aura outside when they were trapped in the barrier, [seeing] nothing unusual so far, the agency did not receive any news of Spiritual Disaster occurring as well.

However, Amami had predicted the ritual would be held in the evening, if his guess was right, the ritual could start any moment.

Shortly after Natsume and Touji, Tenma and Kyouko walked out of the building as well. Followed by Suzuka, then Suisen pushing



Amami on the wheelchair came outside with the public security man.

The man ordered the subordinates rushing over to quickly regroup, he then passed his commanding powers to the other party before following behind Amami.

“Could this be the forewarned terrorist attack?”

“You know it yourself that this is impossible.”

“Amami-san, you couldn’t think of where could Kurahashi Chief be?”

“Do you think Chief would be at the place where I can guess? He is surely at Souma Takiko’s side, perhaps they are starting the ceremony right now.”

Amami used a rough tone to answer Touji who is rushing towards himself. It’s just that while he answered the man and Touji’s questions, his brain is working is full speed, predicting how things will develop from now. On the other hand, Natsume jumped upon hearing the term ceremony.

“On the **Heavenly Altar.**”

“What?”

“[Tensou Chifu Ritual] is a magic ceremony extended from [Taizan Fukun Ritual], if Takiko and the rest wants to hold the ceremony, they must be at a place with Heavenly Altar set up!”

From what Natsume knows, the Heavenly Altar is set up in two locations. One of them is on the top of the [Imperial Hill] that is near the Tsuchimikado Main House, the same place where Natsume and Harutora went to stop Suzuka, as she tried to revive her brother back then, but that Heavenly Altar is too far away from Tokyo.

The other one is on the rooftop of the Onmyou Academy building, the place where they ambushed Ashiya Doman when Onmyou Academy came under attack. So as to say, the first time Natsume met Takiko was on the rooftop of the academy as well, Takiko expressed that she was visiting the Heavenly Altar at that time.

“Onmyou Academy? Certainly, there is a chance...”

“Wait a minute, I do have a subordinate observing Onmyou Academy, he has not seen Kurahashi Genji appear.”

“Your subordinate that is observing isn’t a magic user, right? In their eyes, sending that kind of subordinate to observe is as good as not sending.”

The way Touji spoke caused the man to feel ashamed, yet he can’t find any words to refute, perhaps he fully understands how difficult it is to investigate magical crimes.

But—

“... There alone it’s just [not enough].”

“Suzuka?”

“Those guys are surely trying to hold a magic ceremony of a rather magnificent scale, after all, that is not to control one person, but to control a god’s soul. The Heavenly Altar used for [Taizan Fukun Ritual] is simply not enough, it should be at least twelve times larger than that... if it’s calculated in multiplication instead of addition, a scale of one hundred and fifty times or more is required to carry out the technique.”

Suzuka participated in a part of the research when she was under Yashamaru. Even though she did not take part in the core areas, but she was able to know about the general situation to a certain extent.

Hearing Suzuka’s explanation, “One hundred and fifty times...!” Tenma couldn’t help to be shocked. “Where can we find an altar with such a scale?”

“We wouldn’t be guessing so hard if we knew, stupid glasses!”

“But logically speaking it shouldn’t be inside Tokyo city, it is impossible not to gain people’s attention by preparing such a large altar.”

After Kyouko finishing speaking, “No, it couldn’t be said this way.”

Amami rejected her views.

“They are trying to summon Taira no Masakado, speaking of the current Masakado-sama, the guardian god of Tokyo, it is impossible to descend to other locations.”

“Anyway, we do not have the time to slowly look for that altar, let’s try our luck, we shall now rush to Onmyou Academy.”

“I just said the altar isn’t large enough, right!”

“Now isn’t the time to look for altars, right?”

Touji and Suzuka argued without stopping, “Stop arguing.” Tenma came forward to stop them. However, if they were to believe what Suzuka said, then Onmyou Academy wouldn’t be able to prepare such a large altar due to being an easy target of attention.

-- But such a large altar couldn’t be fully invisible as well, it is still reasonable if it’s located deep in the mountains, to prepare in the center of the city yet did not attract any attention, this is really... The scale of the altar is determined by how much spiritual power and magical power it can contain, how big or small do not have a direct relationship of comparison with physical scale, but it is not fully unrelated either. If there is a need of a hundred and fifty times large Heavenly Altar, its scale would be rather huge.

-- Where could it be?

Just as Natsume couldn’t think of any ideas no matter how hard she tries, things started to change.

The first to notice was Hummer. “Master.” Hummer, which stopped on the circular car park, called out.

“Observation shows the possibility of all surrounding [AR4 – Morito] being unusual, the magical power exchanged between them is unusually increased.”

“Eh, wh, what do you mean?”

Tenma couldn’t understand what is going on for a moment, as he

asked back, something behind him was blasted away.

Explosives. This idea flashed past his mind, Natsume and the rest turned and looked towards the direction of the noise in alert. That was opposite of the agency separated by the circular car park—the walkway in front of the road. There stands something similar to a Jizo Hall, a one metre tall shrine. The roof of the small shrine was destroyed by the explosion, a loud noise was produced before it landed on the asphalt road.

Before the explosion, they did not notice something like that was erected there. That thing looks like a small shrine, but it's actually a shikigami—mechanical type that uses materials as body [AR4 – Morito], was placed around the city by Onmyou Agency.

But—

“This is...?”

“Wh, what is with the amount of magic power?”

Natsume speechlessly [look] at [Morito], Kyouko helplessly cried out. “What happened?” Amami asked sharply, but not a single person there had the strength to answer his question.

[Morito] is an extremely special shikigami, it is not a single unit, but as a whole to form [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network], every [Morito] is an end of the detection network as well as a detection radar.

Currently, [Morito] is filled with large amount of magical power exceeding its capacity, moreover, there were many magical lines branching out of [Morito], perhaps they were connected to other nearby [Morito] units. [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network] utilises the exchange of magic power between [Morito] units, it's a system that uses transmitting of magical power to notify about spiritual disaster happening. In other words, even though they are still operating normally, the amount of magical power exchanged is far from usual, moreover, the amount of magical power is still continually increasing.

“It is judged that the phenomenon now is similar to the level four spiritual disaster happened in Ogikubo previously, but the amount of magical power detected at the moment is three hundred times or more.”

“Three—” Natsume was speechless for a moment.

“Damn it, what is going on! Couldn’t be that it detected a large spiritual disaster happening right!”

The possibility Touji shouted made everyone felt cold, indeed, looking at how [Morito] is reacting, there is no other possibilities. In the past, Tsuchimikado Yakou had failed holding a magic ceremony causing a large spiritual disaster, after that the spiritual phase of Tokyo changed because to it, becoming the ultimate reason why spiritual disasters kept on happening to date. Souma wanted to hold [Tensou Chifu Ritual], is really [the ceremony that Yakou failed].

However, “Wrong!” Suzuka rejected his views.

“This... this isn’t just magic power! This is a **magic technique** that follows a procedure! Someone is using the detection network to perform a magic technique—”

Suddenly...

Suzuka widened her eyes greatly, she stopped speaking halfway. She frantically swings her twin tails, [seeing] the surroundings, “Don’t tell me.” She muttered in shock.

“... The, the detection network is spread throughout the entire city... the scale is sufficient... those guys are trying to **use [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network] as Heavenly Altar!**... they had set up this detection network from the very beginning for **this purpose!**”

Even Natsume gasped at the words of Suzuka.

The installation of the detection network in the entire city was already done, the scale isn’t something the Heavenly Altar in Onmyou Academy could compare to. If the entirety of the network is used as an altar for the magic ceremony, it would be effortless to fulfil the condition Suzuka had stated earlier.

The magic technique flowed into the detection network with great speed, spreading between [Morito] units, soon it will form an extremely large altar encompassing the entire heart of Tokyo city.

In other words...

“They had started [Tensou Chifu Ritual]!”

“How could this--!”

Despair caused Natsume to feel faint, she could not do anything, only to [see] the magic power lines flowing in front of her eyes. If they were to destroy the [Morito] in front of them immediately, perhaps they could stop the flow of magic power lines, however, [Morito] is installed everywhere in the city, forming a net shaped detection network, even if they sever the magic power line in front of them, it wouldn't any huge effects. The countdown has ended, Natsume stood there without moving.

But—

-- **Strange?**

[Unknown things] can be [seen] added into the magic technique infused in the magic power lines, and during the moment the [unknown things] were felt, the happenings during that time flashed past Natsume's mind without her knowing why— the feeling when Akino used Far Step that time.

It was sound that time, but this time... this magic power...

“Harutora?”

Coming up closely, a second change happened.



It seems like the peaceful temple grounds on the surface has swapped with the altar hidden underground, the scenery in front looks like an exchange of the [secular world] and [under world].

The accumulated ley lines of the sky and earth connects the sky faraway and Takiko on the stone platform, the scenery of the scarlet sky— the sky, welcoming Omagatoki, transferred aura through the ley lines. The aura that descended from above Takiko's head spread outwards, the place inside surrounded by the Torri turned into a [world] unknown to Akino. Magnificently beautiful and overwhelming— holy, an appearance that is suitable to be called [god's territory].

Takiko's body filled with powerful magic, read out the incantations on the scroll in a loud voice.

What was fearful is that, as she read the incantations, the sky continued to develop new ley lines, connecting to the miko's body. The ley lines crossed each other, fused, continually increase in power. [Taizan Fukun Ritual] is a magic ceremony that uses the existence of the spirit called [Taizan Fukun] as a contact, the higher positioned [Tensou Chifu Ritual] isn't just [Taizan Fukun], it a worshipping ceremony that requires the worship of all twelve gods. Not just concentrating on one god, but a complicated magic technique that relates many gods.

Anyway, to calculate the amount of [gods] is a senseless action. From the [Imperial Style Onmyou Techniques] point of view, gods **spread** throughout the world, it normally exists everywhere, it's a general entity as well as a single entity, it's a single entity as well as a general entity. No matter if the eight million gods are treated as collection of individuals, or the portion of single existence, or even looking from another perspective, no one can judge what is right or what is wrong as well.

Gods have different appearance, and it changes with time, sometimes gather and sometimes separate, sometimes changes its name, return to its original appearance, or to be born again after disappearing. Following the observations of observers, it has infinite changes, yet it commonly exists in this world. It is logical no matter the explanation, magic techniques categorise this kind of situation, giving them a name and even add in other meanings, all these are just to coordinate with the needs of the observers.

The only thing that is clear as day, the difference in scale between

[Tensou Chifu Ritual] and [Taizan Fukun Ritual]. A larger and stronger [hall] is required to hold [Tensou Chifu Ritual] compared to [Taizan Fukun Ritual]. Moreover, in the [Imperial Style] techniques, the larger the [hall] the more stable it is, according to the records left in the Kurahashi Household, Tsuchimikado Yakou had put in a lot of effort into this as well.

For that, Yashamaru— Dairenji Shidou came out with the idea of [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network].

“—The head of Souma Clan Souma Takiko hereby humbly report to the ancestral spirit Taira no Masakado—”

After finish reading the incantations, Takiko raised the scroll to her head level, the scroll then automatically floats up above her, it then burned up as in seemingly green blue flames. The spiritual pressure on the stone platform appear to be highly destructive, escaping into a corner inside the temple grounds, Akiko curled up with her rabbit ears straightened, her body shook uncontrollably.

“Kurahashi! I’m leaving it to you!”

Standing together with his mistress on the altar, Yashamaru sent him instructions while continuously repairing the magic technique. For [Tensou Chifu Ritual], other than Takiko attaining god form, her guardians, Yashamaru and Kumomaru had to be involved in the magic technique as well, unable to leave, thus, things related on how will the magic technique proceed, they had checked thoroughly a few times before.

Among the Torri that surrounds the stone platform, Kurahashi was standing by at the side of the Black Torri that stands in the north, Miyachi could be seen on standby at the side of the Blue Torri of the east. Coordinating with the instructions from Yashamaru, the two of them faced each other, allowing the spiritual pressure between them to change, directing the aura that is coming out of the altar.

Between the Blue and Black Torri, the stone platform which is filled with aura— was released at one go through the Demon Gate



positioned in the North East. The front of the Demon Gate on the altar is the praying hall of Kanda Shrine— behind the praying hall is a magnificent main hall. The aura went straight through the praying hall and was completely absorbed by the main hall, then with the prepared magic technique, magic power lines shoots out in all directions.

The magic power lines extend towards the ends of [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network], mechanical type [AR4 – Morito]. [Morito] units were broken while sustaining magic power lines that is over their limited capacity, but they were not completely broken, so they continued connecting magic power lines to other neighbouring [Morito] units. This kept on repeating, causing a chain reaction, the connection of magic power lines resulted in an explosive growth, forming into a strong magic technique on the [net] of the [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network].

Magic power lines extended throughout the entire city, forming a large altar. Onmyou Agency— the [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network] Kurahashi promoted, is actually a preparation for this moment. [Morito] had a shape of a small shrine, but perhaps no one had realised that shape is a copy of the main hall of the Kanda Shrine.

The huge altar and the ley line underground of Tokyo started to resonate, that ley line was previously dug by Dairenji Shidou and Mutoke Chihito and they revived it. The ley lines of other places were directed by the magic technique flowing in the magic power lines, flowed to the center of the Heavenly Altar— the stone platform that appeared at Kanda Shrine. The ley lines pulsed, cycling along with the magic power lines.

Flowing from the sky to Takiko, flowing from Takiko to the detection network, flowing from the detection network to the ley lines, then return to Takiko, it looks as if blood vessels that goes through the entire city. If the Heavenly Altar is described as blood vessels, the stone platform and Takiko standing on it could be described as the heart of the incarnated [god].

Bright light fully surrounds the miko, the ley lines connecting the sky and earth is like a standing pillar holding the heavens. The aura

flowing downwards changed the appearance of the surroundings, reminds people of the myth of the birth of the country, where Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto dive the spear, Ame no Nuboko, to churn the chaos in the lower world.

Everything is going well. As the worshipping ceremony is in progress, Yashamaru gave such a comment.

Staying in the real world even after dying, the stubborn shikigami observed the mythical scenery, was extremely excited. Yet, he did not lose his cool because of it, the technique could collapse anytime, it wouldn't be surprising if the Heavenly Altar couldn't withstand the load and collapse.

However, the ceremony continues on, it is not a discussion of theory in the research laboratory, but an actual demonstration in the real world.

He could feel many or many levels of large [existence] that spread across the entire world, one of it being inside of Takiko's body slowly showing its entity form, that is an [existence] which is called out by Takiko, directed by her blood. His heart beat increased, he even felt faint. Yashamaru, who is Dairenji Shidou and Souma Clan, had worshiped and waited for a long thousand years, this spiritual existence which everybody has been long waiting for— one of the gods or a portion of god's [existence].

Takiko is trying to let such a [existence] wake up from a thousand-year slumber, appearing in reality. Yashamaru kept up his guard, observing this moment.

It was this thinking, that he had lowered his guard.

“Yashamaru!”

Kurahashi shouted, Yashamaru returned to his senses, as if waking up startled.

He did not feel the change immediately. Nothing had changed— wrong, the cycle had slowed down. After noticing this, the situation where the flow of magic power had stopped rapidly deteriorate.

“Kumomaru!” even though he injected magic power to aid the cycle as the same time, but it was an inadequate measure.

“How could this happen!”

Yashamaru desperately used magic to break the stopping of magic power flow, but it was ineffective. His mind went black, he couldn’t think of the cause and the counter measures for it. Thinking of the things in front of him breaking soon, yet he had no way of stopping it, this situation called out a feeling that he had long forgotten.

Fear.

However, “Yashamaru!” after Kurahashi shouted at him angrily, he came back to his senses.

“There are other magic techniques mixed into the back-flowing ley lines! Someone had set a trap!”

He immediately turned his focus towards the ley lines where magic powers were back-flowing. The magic power follows the technique to become a magic technique, but a portion of the back-flowing magic powers from the entire city had its technique changed out. Moreover, the techniques that were changed— it’s like adding poison into water current, contaminating the entire cycle. Where did it came from? In order to search for the source, Yashamaru concentrated on following the flow of the ley lines. He then realised the truth, clenching his teeth angrily.

Those [unknown things] that is mixed into the magic powers flowing into the Heavenly Altar were all from **Shinjuku Branch** and **Meguro Branch** of the Exorcist Bureau.

“**Goddamned that guy!**” he scolded in a low voice.

“Princess! Princess! Can you hear me?”

Yashamaru called out to his mistress, yet Takiko did not respond. She closed her eyes and stood there swaying lightly, as if she had lost her entire mass. She was already god descended half way—in a state of being possessed. Yashamaru clenched his teeth, “Kumomaru!” he called out viciously.

“Stop the ceremony for now! Move away from the technique!”

After receiving the order, Kumomaru added a new technique into the [Tensou Chifu Ritual] that is still in progress. The flow of magic powers completely stopped, the waves of aura stabilised, but it did not disappear. The ley lines connecting the sky and earth remained in its shape, if this ley line were to break, the ritual would completely collapse. Of course, to let the ritual stop half way was quite a difficult task, but Kumomaru succeeded.

“Chief? What is going on?”

Kumomaru was confused after being expelled from the technique, rushing to the side of Yashamaru, Kurahashi and Miyachi went over with a stern look as well, only Akino did not understand what had happened, continued looking at the altar from a distance.

On the other hand, Yashamaru, like Takiko, is still in the [Tensou Chifu Ritual] technique, “It’s Tsuchimikado Harutora.” He said hatefully.

“He pulled one over us. Last night and the previous night, Tsuchimikado Harutora didn’t just attack the branches, even in the detection network-- he had placed magic techniques inside the [Morito] units in the branches!”

Inside the net shaped [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network], the [Morito] in the main branch and in the other branches are important rely points. Harutora had hide techniques in the two locations that would activate after reacting to [Tensou Chifu Ritual], the area that it had spread has perhaps reached more than half of the Heavenly Altar.

Compared to his angry comrades that were clenching their teeth, Kurahashi nodded his head, remained calm, it’s just that his expression was rather stern.

“Is there any counter measure to this?”

“Even though it would be tedious, but we could only use the most direct method to solve it. We first have to undo the opponent’s

technique, then let this undoing technique flow through the cycle, of course the Heavenly Altar must retain its shape.

“Wait a minute, should we move princess to somewhere safe?”

“No way.” Yashamaru immediately rejected Kumomaru’s view. “The aura of the Heavenly Altar had stabilised, it would not move unless we undo it, this ritual would end once we undo it, so we can only proceed in this kind of situation.”

Harutora surely wouldn’t think that they would be wiped out with this single attack. Even though the Heavenly Altar was contaminated, but Yashamaru prevented the situation from getting worse as well, the opponent would logically expect for this kind of development. To be honest, the aim of Harutora setting this trap, is to create this sticky situation.

In other words—

“Kurahashi, the princess is the target of the opponent, by making princess unable to move from here. **He is coming.** I cannot move, but I will start undoing the spell immediately, you must defend this place in the meantime, start preparing with Kumomaru and Miyachi against the incoming attack.”



Tokyo Shinjuku.

There were three shadows looking into the east on the rooftop of a tall building that prohibits anyone from entering.

A single eye Onmyouji dressed in black.

A single arm oni dressed in a suit with the left sleeve swaying with the wind.

A young fox demon with animal ears and tail.

Five eyes looked towards the ley line at a distance that extends

straight towards the setting sun from the ground. That was a pillar that connects the sky and the earth, it is also the bridge that connects the under world and the secular world. At a rather early stage, they had already notice that the opponents would use the detection network for [Tensou Chifu Ritual], the question was where would Takiko be at. They had thought of a few locations, Souma seemed to have used one of them.

That location is at Kanda Shrine.

“They fell into the trap.” Oni laughed.

“Of course.” The Onmyouji answered.

“To remove the wild scheme of those guys, the only way is to remove the miko, that is their lifeline, they are well aware of this as well.”

“That was why you let them prepare till the last moment, pulling them up to the surface, waited until they are nearly finished with their goal before you made your move...”

The Onmyouji did not reply to all the Oni’s words.

Even if there was no need to consider about Onmyou Agency, they still have to prepare the most important ritual on their own. Because of this, they had no time to care about other things, resulting in a chance for the others, allowing Amami to come forward about the exposition, for Harutora to lay a trap. [Time] isn’t just tight for the attacking side.

It’s just, “**What happens next is key.**” The Onmyouji swayed his black cloak after finish speaking. He stepped on the ground with a [knock] sound.

“Being affected by the magic technique casted by us, they cannot use the ley line, it also means there is no way of using Far Step. Moreover... the opponents are, of course, prepared for attacks.”

Onmyouji spoke calmly, he then turned his head to the side.



“... Kon.”

“Yes.”

The one that answered this call was a young girl.

After a moment of hesitation, “No problems, really?”—Onmyouji did not ascertain this with her, “I will leave it to you.” But rather with such an order.

The young girl was waiting for him to display such an attitude, to be reserved or being considerate would hurt her pride instead. The young girl placed the order from her master in her heart, displaying with pride and determination, she forms a hand seal.

Lag appeared on her entire body, the frozen powers were released, transforming her into her original look.

A coquettish lady in her prime of youth appeared before them.

Having an extremely unstable aura, she had remained in younger form with her powers frozen for the past few days, concentrating on recovering. A guardian that was suppose to protect her master originally, in the end, not only she wasn't useful, she even burdened her master. She had much regret about her own inability during this period of time— now a chance to redeem herself has arrived.

Her master had finally made up his mind due to how things had developed. He was ashamed to let his unstable guardian to take such a risk, however, if they lose the battle, she [will not stay alive] is a fact as well. They must win this battle, for the sake of victory, he is willing to use any methods.

This is a group battle.

Kurahashi and Souma side must have the same idea as well.

“—Let's go.”

A cold declaration.



If the others had heard this, they would surely tremble in fear. Regardless of his voice, attitude or aura, all of them carry a bone chilling strength.

Oni revealed his fangs as he smiled, the body of the fox demon trembled. The clothes of the Onmyouji whipped, rushing to the battlefield along with the two guardians.



# Chapter 4 - Fight

# Part 1

“Ah ah, damn it, what is happening exactly!”

A stiff smile— Touji looked like smiling was the only thing he could do when encountering such a situation, helplessly cursed. This scolding from him without a doubt says about what everyone around him was thinking.

The sudden strange happening had suddenly slowed down, the magic power lines connecting [Morito] units did not disappear, but had obviously stopped.

In fact, “The magic power among [Morito] were in a stable condition, even though the numbers remained high, but compared to the highest value observed a moment before, it had decreased drastically, now it’s still decreasing at a slow rate.” Everyone couldn’t hide their worries after listening to Hummer’s report.

Among them, only Natsume started to speak.

“... Harutora.”

“What?”

“It’s Harutora, it’s definitely him, Harutora had stopped the [Tensou Chifu Ritual].”

Natsume’s words contain inexplicable confidence, Touji had nothing to say but he did not refute as well, Kyouko, Tenma and Suzuka were the same as well.

Even though it couldn’t be guessed when it would happen, but no one thinks that Harutora would not care about this matter. To say that [this change] was caused by Harutora, it wouldn’t be farfetched.

“... Truly.” Amami agreed with her view. “Other than the enemy, the person that knows the most about [Tensou Chifu Ritual] is him. However, the ritual—technique wasn’t [broken], but was [stopped], shows that things hasn’t ended yet.”

“Yes.”

Natsume quickly replied Amami who pointed out this fact.

Harutora made his move. Other than stopping [Tensou Chifu Ritual] and defeating Souma and Kurahashi, it's impossible that he had other goals, it's the same for Natsume and the rest as well. In other words, now is the time for Natsume and the rest to fight alongside with Harutora.

Perhaps Natsume's intentions had been conveyed, the morale of Touji and the rest rose rapidly as well. Touji strike a punch on his palm, Kyouko straightened her body, Suzuka revealed a maniac smile.

However, “Wait, wait a minute, even if we want to stop it, [Tensou Chifu Ritual] has already begun, right? If we are to carelessly obstruct them, causing the ritual to fail, wouldn't that cause a large spiritual disaster...” Tenma fearfully spoke, this concern was quite reasonable. In the past, Tsuchimikado Yakou held the [Tensou Chifu Ritual] and failed, resulting in a large spiritual disaster that changed the spiritual phase of Tokyo. The general public had thought this way, Ashiya Doman, who knows what actually happened, spoke the same thing as well.

“Harutora should know about this more than anyone else, even so, he still stopped them, he must have a good reason for doing this.”

Ashiya Doman had explained that [the large spiritual disaster was caused by failed ritual], but he had clearly said that he [had no means of approaching close], in other words, he wasn't clear about the most important truth.

On the other hand, Harutora— Tsuchimikado Yakou was the person involved, he was the center character of this matter. Moreover, Harutora wouldn't risk allowing a large spiritual disaster to happen, but rather he would use this move to prevent this tragedy.

“I believe in Harutora.”

“... Me too. Even though these words of Natsume doesn't sound convincing at all, but I think it's the right judgement.”

Hearing how Touji was mocking herself, Natsume angrily revealed an unconvinced expression, but she didn't refute, only her cheeks reddened slightly, she too understand that she would lose her cool easily when met with things related to Harutora. Tenma nodded with a straight face, agreeing with Natsume's conclusion.

At this moment, "The missing Miyoshi Tougo called in! He requested to speak with Amami Daizen!" A policeman holding a wireless electronic came rushing to the circular carpark.

Natsume and the rest were nervous, the man in charge of commanding onsite took the wireless phone from his subordinate and turned towards Amami, he extended the phone out without a word. The subordinate was surprised, surely this was something utterly unacceptable in terms of procedures.

"— Thank you."

Amami thanked him from the bottom of his heart, taking the wireless phone. He turned on the loudspeaker mode, an action to show his thanks to the man. Natsume and the rest hurriedly gathered around Amami, paying full attention to the conversation between them.

Then, "How are you, Amami previous chief, I am Miyoshi. Are there anyone on your side injured?" that was a deep yet carefree voice. "It's been a long time, Miyoshi." Amami was collected as well, but he gave a quick reply.

"Fortunately, there were no casualties from our side. Let me confirm this, you are aware of what's going on?"

"I have an overall understanding."

"In other words, you couldn't care less about the barrier on the Agency?"

"I'm sorry, to approach brazenly into a place that obviously is a trap goes against my principles."

"It's okay, this is just like you."

"But we had spent a huge effort to prevent Yuge from running out."

“Yuge is together with you? So, the twins as well then? What about Yamashiro?”

“He is here too.”

“He and Kurahashi--”

“They had break off relations with each other, I can vouch for this.”

Even though his vouch seems to be nonchalant, “Oh.” Amami’s tone seems to be very interested.

“You vouch huh, could it be that you had developed feelings after working with each other?”

“I can’t deny that.”

“Ha, so be it. To be able to increase our firepower at this time is something more than welcomed, what about Kagami? Our side couldn’t contact him.”

“It’s the same on my side. We had used many methods, yet we are unable to contact him, we had originally planned to persuade him to join us before making our move, it ended up only wasting time. I think we should prioritise on the things in front of us now.”

“That’s true.”

The pace of the conversation is neither too frustrating nor too worrying, yet the discussion went on quickly, both of them did not say anything redundant.

Amami and Miyoshi were both important people of the Onmyou Agency, one of them is the brain of the organisation, the other is the eyes of the organisation, the two had dealt with various kinds of situations. They knew each other well, it’s natural that they worked closely together when met with emergency situations.

“Have you [see] [what situation] it is right now?”

“Yes, the entire city— the [Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network] that the chief’s side pushed forward, some unknown

techniques had flowed into this magical network, initiating the revival of the ley line. It's just after that, someone mixed in a different technique into the network."

"That is the [altar] set up in the city, the ultra-large-scale ritual prepared by chief's side, the one stopping the ritual perhaps is Tsuchimikado Harutora. I want to know the location of both parties, do you have any way of knowing where the center of the altar is and the locations which allows other techniques flowing into the altar?"

"Regarding the former, the answer is yes. The center of the network is at Kanda Shrine, couldn't it be [seen] from the agency? To be honest, this has developed into something that people wouldn't dare to [see] directly, this is totally a part of change in heaven and earth."

His tone was calm, which makes it more terrifying. Those listening from the side knows as well, Miyoshi wasn't the kind to use exaggerated words to express things, he rather straightforwardly used [change in heaven and earth] for description, it means that such an event fitting that description was currently happening.

Moreover...

-- Kanda Myoujin!

Kanda Myoujin— the official name is called Kanda Shrine, of course Natsume knows of this name. that's the shrine that protects Edo and worships Taira no Masakado. Speaking of which, the place where they met Takiko a few days back was also near Kanda Myoujin.

That place wasn't far from the Agency.

"Hama!"

Before Natsume could speak, Tenma had already called out to the shikigami. Hummer let out a fierce engine noise, looking as if ready to move anytime, rushed to the side of its master.

"Is there no way to know where is Harutora?"

"The locations where the techniques flow into are at Shinjuku Branch and Meguro Branch, this means the other party isn't directly using



techniques, but rather traps placed two nights ago during the attacks, this is the most reasonable explanation.”

“So, there is no knowing where he is right now then.”

“Yes... ah, please wait a moment.”

The conversation stopped suddenly, Miyoshi’s voice distanced from the phone. Sounds from his surroundings could be heard through the phone, a woman’s shouting could be heard softly.

After a few seconds.

“Apologises, just now from Shinjuku— on the west direction, it’s confirmed that there are three [Armoured Juggernaut] moving, it’s already confirmed they are the same things that was [seen] in the Dark Temple.”

“[Armoured Juggernaut]?”

Amami looked towards Natsume while speaking, Natsume nodded with strength. Natsume had witness first-hand the [Armoured Juggernauts] at the Dark Temple, that three [Armoured Juggernaut] were the unquestionably same ones used by Harutora to attack the Dark Temple.

“What should we do?” Touji asked Natsume. “Takiko and Harutora—the [Armour Juggernauts] could be a decoy as well.”

Rushing over from the Agency location in Akihabara, the nearest would be Kanda Myoujin. Solely relying on themselves to win against Takiko’s camp is near impossible, but it shouldn’t be a problem to stop the ritual from continuing. On the other hand, if they were to meet up with Harutora in Shinjuku, perhaps they could forge a better collaboration, of course it’s also possible that they hinder Harutora’s plans.

No one expressed their views, everybody was waiting for Natsume’s judgement. Natsume looked at Amami, he too only grinned at her without saying anything.

“... Meeting up with Harutora would be our number one priority, we

shall make our way to Shinjuku.”

## Part 2

When receiving the report, Shigeoka was accepting Public Security's interrogation.

To be honest, he was very confused. To be someone like himself, when comes to such situations, he must stand in the frontlines commanding people below him—he was very clear about this in his mind, but this matter right now was something exceeding his capabilities, he couldn't help but to develop this kind of feelings.

Just the matter about Amami Chief exposing Kurahashi Chief yesterday, was already something unimaginable, then the public security came in to do a forced investigation on the day of the forewarned terrorist attack. Even when he was interrogated, he had some kind of feeling that such things shouldn't happen in reality.

Shigeoka believes that something went wrong somewhere in the middle, but this was just his own personal belief, there wasn't any justification. It's impossible for him to work based on his feelings, ordering his subordinates to believe what he believes in. Moreover, now is the time Onmyou Agency must put in all its manpower to stop the terrorist attack, why exact does things developed into this state?

[Early Spiritual Disaster Detection Network] to behave abnormally out of the sudden was the last straw before he was crushed. Shigeoka thinks in terms of efficiency in exorcising spiritual disaster work, the detection network was state of the art creation, giving a rather high commendation, thus, it was hard for him to accept when abnormalities happened.

So far, he knew that some magic was performed on the detection network formed by [Morito] units, perhaps the detection network was being used for unacceptable purposes, to place some sort of magical formation inside the city. But who was doing this for some unknown purpose, there was no way to judge now, the Magical Crime Investigation Department should have headed out to investigate, but due to the forced investigation by the Public Security, all their activities had to be stopped.

Perhaps this was actually the forewarned terrorist attack, next, spiritual disaster would happen inside the city. Anger, frustration and worry caused Shigeoka to nearly go crazy.

That's why the moment he received that report, Shigeoka finally calmed down. The report stated very clearly o the things he should do— at least that was what he thought.

“Independent Officer! Three [Armoured Juggernaut] appeared on the capitol expressway! Moving towards us on the number four Shinjuku line.”

Looking at the report, the identity of the other party seems to be Tsuchimikado Harutora.

To bring him into justice was the last official order Shigeoka received. Anyway, it is an actual fact that he attacked Shinjuku Branch and Meguro Branch. Regardless of the contents Amami had exposed, he has actually committed a [crime], moreover now the military purpose [Armoured Juggernaut] were being used.

If that's the case—

-- It's my duty to stop him.

So far, Shigeoka wasn't arrested, especially the terrorist attack that was about to happen, if he wants to go forward to stop it, it would be difficult for the Public Security to stop him forcefully. He then convinced the person-in-charge onsite and proceeded to meet up with the engineers of the Fujiwara Industries.

They seem to have received the news about [Armoured Juggernauts] appearing, the moment Shigeoka was seen rushing over, the main engineer in charge of developing [FAR] stood up from his chair excitedly.

“Shigeoka Independent Officer! We had just received news about the military purpose—”

“I know! Move out immediately, this is the first battle of [FAR]!”

Things outside of expectation happened one after another, not just

the main engineer, the other engineers from Fujiwara Industries fell into a heavy mood. However, Shigeoka's declaration swept away all their worries, the eyes of everyone were shining brightly, each of them rushed to their respective work place.

"That... Shigeoka-san? I know I should say this kind of things... Is doing this really alright?" the only main engineer who understands Shigeoka's position spoke.

"It's okay, we only need to perform our best in our respective fields—isn't that right?"

Shigeoka asked sharply, the main engineer couldn't find any words for a moment, "Yes." Finally nodding his head in agreement. He then for the sake of fully supporting Shigeoka, he quickly gave out orders to his subordinates. "Technique release! [FAR 01], [02], [03], [04], [05], [06], [07], [08] activate!"

All the [FAR – VER 7] on standby activated at once, Shigeoka used magic for controlling, he then boarded the transport vehicle of the exorcising spiritual disaster team and left the branch. The main engineer accompanied him, the eight [FAR] moved on wheels on the road were following in a line behind the high-speed transport vehicle.

Sun had set, even though the sky was bright still, but the colour had gradually changed from red to purple and into dark blue. Ancient technology operating the latest machines, under the highly skilled operator's control, they moved together forward in unison in the large city of Shinjuku where night fall approaches.

[FAR] had no problems. Shigeoka who had this thinking created his general purpose [ML28 – Karura] inside the transport vehicle. After the shikigami flew into the sky, he focused his mind on the shikigami, rushed towards the reported location first.

[Karura] and [FAR] were the same, both were specially made, shikigamis that requires the user's mastery in control and accuracy. In order to allow them to work together more flexibly, he kept training for the past few days. First was to let [Karura] fly at high speeds towards the site, confirming the location of the target.

He quickly found it.

On the capitol expressway that only has few vehicles due to the traffic restrictions, there was a strange body travelling towards Shinjuku from the west.

There were three armoured type Tsuchigumo made with Metal, the Tsuchigumos formed a line, using their eight legs to move at high speeds, moving forward on the high road. A few years ago, he saw the outer form of Tsuchigumo at Magical Items Storage Facility in Hachiouji, however this is the first time he had seen Tsuchigumo in action. The awesome and fluid-flowing movements as if living organisms, it's hard to imagine this form was created from battles.

-- Imperial Ground Forces... Properties left behind by Tsuchimikado Yakou huh.

The dead spirits of World War II were awakened in the modern era, running on the capitol expressway. Thinking about this calmly, this is something rather strange, but the him leading [FAR] doesn't fit to say such things. On some levels of sense, this was a challenge from Shigeoka and the engineers towards Tsuchimikado Yakou and the Imperial Ground Forces.

The movement speed of the [Armoured Juggernauts] weren't to the point of horrifying, even though they were considered fast among normal mechanical types, but they couldn't compare to [FAR] that uses wheels to move. According to this situation, there was no need to worry about the other party escaping once the battle starts.

"Target has been confirmed, we will reach the initial stage in a few minutes. We are entering the expressway from Shinjuku, attacking them!"

The moment he received report on the appearance of [Armoured Juggernauts], he had given the order to seal the capitol expressway off completely. Perhaps there were still normal vehicles travelling on the expressway, but logically speaking, there should only be a few of them left, they can attack with full force. Shigeoka continued using [Karura] to pursue the [Armour Juggernauts], controlling [FAR] to overtake the transport vehicle he is on to rush to the site first, the

eight [FAR] that originally travelled at similar speeds with the transport vehicle rushed out at full speed at the same time.

Once entered the expressway, Shigeoka controlled [FAR] through [Karura] instead. Even in the eyes of experts, even the switching of magic power transmission was done perfectly, this was the result of Shigeoka's strict training, the degree of control through [Karura] was the same as how he used [Modified Emperor] and [Modified Yaksha] previously.

“... The information about [FAR] was sent here... they are working normally... their conditions are great...!”

The chief engineer stared at the laptop that he brought along, Shigeoka listened to his report as he gathered his focus. There were no civilian vehicles on the expressway, Shigeoka used this fact to control [FAR] to rush in the reverse direction, arranging them into two rows, then...

The three [Armoured Juggernauts] that were locked on as well as the [FAR] team appeared in the sights of [Karura]. Not knowing if they were being overly cautious — of course, they should have been overly cautious— the leader of the [Armoured Juggernauts], after finding out about [FAR], seems to panic due to the appearance of unknown bodies.

Shigeoka's heartbeat increased.

“—Attack!”

The moment the words left his mouth, two [FAR] units— [01] and [02] initiated attack on the frontmost [Armoured Juggernaut].

Comparing their sizes, [FAR] was twice smaller than [Armoured Juggernaut], but their weights weren't that much different, that was why the [FAR] units rushed in from the front and using their specialty of flexibility, made their way to the sides before initiating attacks from both sides.

The legs were their target of attack.

The [Armoured Juggernaut] raised its legs immediately, allowing its

body to float, dodging [FAR] attacks while maintaining the same speed as it continues moving forward. Shortly after, [FAR] unit [03], [04], [05] began attacking, however, their attacks were skilfully dodged by the [Armoured Juggernaut]. It wasn't just the frontmost unit, the two units behind as well.

--Impressive.

The movements of [FAR] were rather flexible, however, the reactive movements of [Armoured Juggernaut] were faster than [FAR], it's as if old soldiers using their experience to cover up their lack of abilities. It could be observed from [Karura], the three [Armoured Juggernauts] could execute various kinds of movement, and were rather [skilled].

The eight legs vibrated the surface of the asphalt road, the [Armoured Juggernauts] sped through the highway. Unit [07] and [08] which did not participate in the attack, moved in reverse at high speed after applying emergency brakes, parading in front of the three [Armoured Juggernauts] that formed a line, maintaining a certain distance and try to shave the opponent's speed in a controlled manner. The remaining six units of [FAR] quickly turned back, pursuing the [Armoured Juggernauts] from behind.

My side is better in terms of speed, thus, when facing an opponent with an advantage in terms of weight, it's best to attack from the back rather than the front.

It's just...

-- Where is Tsuchimikado Harutora?

The three [Armoured Juggernauts] seems to be moving on their own, however, logically speaking, it should be Tsuchimikado Harutora controlling their general movements. Even if he is using remote controlling, he should have a shikigami like Shigeoka's [Karura], but no suspicious shikigami could be spotted in the surroundings.

-- The priority now is to stop the [Armoured Juggernauts].

The six [FAR] units chasing behind, attacked the rear of the



[Armoured Juggernauts] simultaneously, however, at the very moment when the attack was launched, the [Armoured Juggernaut] at the center immediately slowed down, covering their blind spot together with the last unit of [Armoured Juggernaut], additionally both units turned over and kicked towards the incoming [FAR] unit.

The surface of the asphalt road shattered, in the midst of the scattering pieces, the [FAR] unit, making waves of clip-clop sounds, moving left and right to dodge the attacks.

This time, that last [Armoured Juggernaut] unit raised its legs, sweeping them towards the side.

“Boom!”

Even quickly retreating wasn't of use, he immediately made the [01] on the far side to turn at maximum speed and jumped, using the jump to dodge the incoming attack aimed towards the ground. However, the [02] behind didn't manage to dodge in time, the armour installed on the legs took the blow of the [Armour Juggernaut].

Heavy.

The armour, which was made of a special material that is lightweight, hard and tough, was dented and cracked, but it survived the strike. Yet, the momentum could not be stopped, the machine slide to the side and crashed into [04]. Shigeoka immediately made [03] and [06] that were on standby to advance and restrain the opponent. The [01] on the ground and [05] that was prepared for incoming attacks were switched of their positions and moved backwards, assisting the two machines that crashed.

“Has the data arrived?”

“Not yet... It's here! The front left leg of [02] is damaged, the armour was broken, part of its internal pneumatic system is destroyed, it should have stop operating right now. The left front leg and the left back leg of [04] is slow in response, hmm... the are no problems otherwise. Both machines can still continue to move!”

After the chief engineer finished his report, Shigeoka quickly turn his consciousness to [Karura], the eyes under the hat shone with passion.

-- How fascinating...!

Shigeoka was impressed, despite knowing he shouldn't be feeling this way.

To be able to perform such mechanical flexibility despite the large body size, especially when the [Armoured Juggernauts] seem to be moving independently. As a technique user—the owner of mechanical-type shikigami, there were many things to learn from the movements of the [Armoured Juggernauts]. Shigeoka was absorbing these knowledges, while at the same time reorganising the [FAR] units. The [Armoured Juggernauts] returned to their original formation as well.

It wasn't long before they arrive at West Shinjuku, there is a interchange there, Shigeoka decided to launch an attack at the sharp corner, controlling [05] and [06] to rush forward in full speed. The [Armoured Juggernauts] sensed this and extended their legs in an attempt to hinder their opponent's movements, but, Shigeoka dodged the attacks and went through them by the side, going around to the front position.

These two units, along with [07] and [08] that was on standby, blocked the road, all four units were moving in reverse, facing towards the [Armoured Juggernauts].

With four units at the front and four units at the back, they launched a pincer attack according to the turn of the road. Shigeoka took the movement speed into consideration while calculating his timing.

“— Deploy capturing net.”

“We have not tested this component yet!”

“It doesn't matter.”

The four units at the front lured the [Armoured Juggernauts] on to the intended path, they were guiding towards the corner while spreading to the side, the four units behind were spreading to the

side as well, exerting pressure to make three [Armoured Juggernaut] units into the corner.

However, just as they were to arrive, the frontmost [Armoured Juggernaut]—unbelievably—continued speeding straight, destroyed the outer wall of the expressway with its large body.

It jumped on to the ground from the highway.

“What!”

Shigeoka was helplessly speechless, the large body of the [Armoured Juggernaut] was thrown mid-air, the action it took which seemingly ignored the laws of gravity looked as if CG was used to create this ultra-realistic view. It was a road directly below, the metal pieces fell, “Don”, the ground produced a huge noise as the metal pieces hit the ground.

The impact the machine experienced was surely immense, however, the [Armour Juggernaut] behaved as if it’s nothing, it shook its body slightly and resumed running on the road. Its stunningly good durability reminded people the fact that [Armoured Juggernauts] was designed for [military use].

After the first machine, the second and third [Armoured Juggernaut] quickly followed and jumped off the capitol expressway. These extremely heavy metal Tsuchigumos shattered the asphalt road they stepped on, “Don”, “Don”, and landed on the road. Shigeoka speechlessly witnessed this scene which looked unreal through [Karura].

However—

-- Wait a minute, just now that was!

The moment when the second [Armoured Juggernaut] unit that was positioned in the middle hit the ground, a figure could be seen on top of its body. The figure only appeared briefly before disappearing, the opponent has turned invisible.

There was someone on top of the [Armoured Juggernaut], it is reasonable to say it was Tsuchimikado Harutora, at least it’s

confirmed that this person was the technique user commanding three units of [Armoured Juggernaut]. -- You shall not escape.

“The target had jumped of the expressway onto the regular road! They are travelling from Koshu Street towards the direction of Shinjuku Station. Relay this message to all units, request for an emergency traffic closure, we shall make our way there too!”

Shigeoka shouted, while he reorganised the [FAR] data in his mind.

-- No problem.

After making this judgement, the [FAR] units made chase from the highway as well. All eight units consecutively landed, the voltage on the legs were increased to maximum, allowing all four legs to absorb its own impact. The alarm in the chief engineer's computer sounded.

“Shi, Shigeoka-san! What are you doing!”

“Ignore the detailed data for now, could you help me readjust, only report major damage to me.”

The [Armour Juggernauts] continued towards Shinjuku Station. There were more cars and people on regular roads, those witnessed the metal Tsuchigumos frantically screamed and ran, the surroundings quickly turned into a state of panic.

Shigeoka controlled the [FARs] to move at high speeds.

-- Damn it, their reactions slowed down.

Jumping down from the highway seemed to have caused a rather huge burden on the machines, even though all [FAR] units were operational, but their reaction slowed, the reaction of [02] was especially slow due to taking an attack from the enemy. That said, the abilities of the technique user could be used to overcome the suboptimal condition of the machines, the true value of the shikigami can only be decided with the master considered into the overall performance, [FAR] is no exception. In fact, [FAR] was still better in terms of speed, the distance between the two closed up quickly, closing into the [Armoured Juggernauts]. The front most units were [07] and [08]. After realising the enemy was closing in, the

[Armoured Juggernauts] continued forward while allowing the armoured warriors to turn around, entering into battle mode.

“Shoot the capture net!”

The launchers that was on the outside of [07] and [08] took aim at the mechanical bodies, shot a bullet that was as large as a golf ball tube at the same time towards the last [Armoured Juggernaut]. The bullet spread open towards the front in mid-air, shooting out the net that was installed inside.

This net bullet was something he had requested the Fujiwara Industries engineers to rush it out for him. The [Armoured Juggernaut] doesn't seem to expect a projectile type attack, it was shocked while immediately dodge the first bullet. However, perhaps due to the loss of balance, it did not had time to dodge the second bullet, it hit the leg.

The net that was on the leg caught on another leg, greatly obstructed the [Armoured Juggernaut] movement. The other six legs hurriedly paced, trying to regain its balance, it was during this time that [06] which was approaching in the opposite direction shot the third bullet.

It was bullseye this time, four legs were caught at once, the [Armoured Juggernaut] fell on to the ground with a loud noise. The remaining five units seized this moment and immediately attacked another unit—the [Armoured Juggernaut] that remained in the center all this while, the one which seemed to have the figure of a technique user on it.

Only one bullet was installed on each [FAR], there remains five more shots. Shinjuku Station is within sight, in order to ensure the target is hit, it was necessary to close in to the enemy as much as possible. Out of the sudden, a man in black appeared on the top of the targeted [Armoured Juggernaut]. That person dispelled invisibility, observing the nearest [FAR].

-- Is that him?

Shigeoka let [Karura] in mid-air dived at high speed.

Yet, before Shigeoka could identify his opponent, the man in black swiftly swing his right arm to the side. Shigeoka thought that the opponent was going to use magic, it wasn't the case, it was a signal. The front [Armoured Juggernauts] cleanly moved its eight legs and rotated its entire body to the back.

The sides of that particular [Armoured Juggernaut] shifted up and down slightly, Shigeoka froze in fear.

The next second, the mechanical cannons of the [Armoured Juggernaut] sprayed fire.

A loud explosion was produced, the cannon bullets rained down on the [FAR] as if a heavy storm, easily destroying the shield that was hastily installed for defence. Shigeoka quickly made the [FAR] retreat, but the [02] with its armour destroyed, did not escape in time. The cannon bullets penetrated the armour and hit the main body. The cannon kept on shooting, quickly enough, [02] was severely damaged and fell on the asphalt road.

-- Damn it!

"F, [FAR02] has stopped operating! What happened?"

"The target fired automatic cannon."

"Automatic cannon? – That, that was mentioned in the reports, right? But, to openly fire in the avenue!"

The report states that during the disturbance at the dark temple, the [Armoured Juggernauts] had used automatic cannons, however, like the chief engineer had mentioned, it was unthinkable that opponent would fire the cannon in an open street. This was an error in judgement by Shigeoka, he let the [FAR] distanced themselves. The figured waved his arm once again, the cannon attacks stopped. Looking at the situation, it seems like the cannons was only installed on that particular [Armoured Juggernaut], but it was threatening enough even with just that one unit.

Two [Armoured Juggernauts] and seven [FARs] faced off while moving, and Shinjuku Station finally came into view. In the midst of

screaming from the surroundings, both parties had entered the bridge passing the front of the North entrance.

At this moment, “I saw it!” the subordinate that was driving the transportation vehicle screamed, Shigeoka stood up from his seat, opening the window then leaned his body out to take a look.

The view that was seen using [Karura] which was flying appeared before him quickly using the same viewpoint. A total of nine large mechanical-type shikigamis crossed the bridge while facing each other, the transportation vehicle that was maintaining a certain distance behind quickly followed.

Continue forward would be the tunnel at Shinjuku National Garden, if he could trap the enemy in the tunnel—

--- No, it wouldn't be possible to use the speed of [FAR] on the narrow road, moreover, if the enemy used the cannons to destroy the tunnel, it would be difficult to continue chasing.

Attack at the front of the tunnel. Shigeoka aimed at the battlefield, reorganised the [FAR] formation. The frontmost units were those which had used the net bullets, [06], [07] and [08], following behind were [01], [03], [04] and [05] running in parallel.

After making up his mind, they immediately close up the gap between the enemy and themselves.

The man in black signalled to open fire once again, the explosive sound made its way to the transportation vehicle, directly shook Shigeoka's eardrums.

His first time experiencing such boldness caused him to tremble helplessly, the armour of the three units at the front was shattered as if ice shattering into pieces after being hit by a hammer, however, Shigeoka wasn't fearful at all, continued to control the [FARs] to move forward.

“Shi, Shigeoka-san!”

“I'm sorry! I'm letting those three units to act as our shield, I couldn't think of any other way.”

The chief engineer went pale, he continued to make the [FARs] forcefully close in on the [Armoured Juggernauts].

In the midst of the smoke from the cannons and the sound of destruction, cannon fires and sparks split, the cannon bullets that hit the ground shaved off the asphalt surface of the road. The armour of [07] finally reached its limits and was destroyed, the legs of [06] were shattered and it fell.

-- Now's the time!

[01] and [03] right behind increased their horsepower to the maximum before jumping over, they readjusted the aim on to the [Armoured Juggernaut] in mid-air which was outside of their opponent's range. However, the [Armoured Juggernaut] did react to such an up down movement. The cannons followed the two [FAR] units and aimed upwards. A barrage of fiery red tail of cannon bullets pierced through [01]. "Damn it." Shigeoka cursed, and made the half destroyed [08] directly crash forward.

The unstable condition that appeared on the [Armoured Juggernaut] body caused by the crash of [08] lost control, the cannons stopped firing as a result as well. At this moment, [03] fired the net bullet, the net opened and caught both the metal Tsuchigumo and [08] which crashed into it.

The Tsuchigumo in the net struggled with all its might, it forcefully raised its legs and plunged it into [08] from above. [08] which was inside the same net stopped operating after receiving this attack, at this moment, [04], which was furthest behind rushed out and fired a second bullet, a net covering over a net, causing the [Armour Juggernaut] to be unable to cope and collapse on the ground, it let out a loud noise before falling and slid to the side before crashing into a pole.

Those [Armoured Juggernauts] in front forsake their companion and continued forward, [04] and [05] grouped up with [03] that was on the ground before giving chase.

"[01], [07], [08] has stopped functioning! [06] is unable to move!"



“I know that!”

The transportation vehicle Shigeoka and the rest were on was avoiding the [FARs] that were destroyed and the [Armoured Juggernaut] that was struggling in the net, while passing through the bridge. Now the situation has become that of one against three, there is only one net bullet left which is on [05].

“Let’s subdue our opponent here right now! Launch a fierce attack!”

We have the advantage in terms of speed, moreover the opponent is transporting a person. Shigeoka made the remaining three [FARs] advance in full speed, forming a half encirclement on the last [Armour Juggernaut] from the back and both sides. The road in front disappears into the ground, that was the Shinjuku National Garden Tunnel, he hopes to subdue the opponent before reaching there.

“Go!”

He unconsciously shouted the order, the three [FAR] units attacked the [Armoured Juggernaut] from three different directions. The man in black was defending against all three directions, the [Armoured Juggernaut] was running while in battle mode.

It was at this moment, a bright light appeared in the tunnel, tearing away the darkness.

It’s thunder.

The sound of sparks and burns in the air could be heard, the thunder attack that came out hit the mechanical body of [03]. [03] movements were forced to stop instantly, the coordination of the three [FARs] became poor, Shigeoka immediately stopped attacking. It seems like it was this moment being waited for, headlights appeared in the deep tunnel and a large vehicle rushed out.

Shigeoka was speechless.

“This was from that time...!”

A Hummer appeared before him, it belongs to that group of people who, in the past, had destroyed his shikigami team and finally

managed to escape.

After the Hummer rush out of the tunnel, its wheels were skidding as the vehicle rotate at high speed, just as the direction change was near 180 degrees, the [Armoured Juggernaut] rushed in from the side.

The [Armour Juggernaut] entered the tunnel, Hummer produced a loud engine noise, rushed back into the tunnel that is rushed out from. Shigeoka grit his teeth, he then let the three [FAR] units rush into the tunnel.



From the information received from the shikigami Shizuka sent out earlier, they had a general understanding of the situation on the ground.

The man in black that was controlling the [Armoured Juggernauts], unknown mechanical-type shikigamis attacking the [Armoured Juggernauts]. The moment after [looking] at the scene in front of the tunnel, Natsume unfastened her seatbelt immediately, stood up from the co-driver seat, and used the thunder spell.

The loud noise of the thunder reverberated through the tunnel, the fellow passengers screamed. A few seconds later, Hummer left the tunnel and rushed onto the ground.

The cover of Hummer fully opened, the view became wider instantly. The overwhelming feeling of heaviness of the metal Tsuchigumo was right in front of them, there were three more units at the back that looks like Tsuchigumo— mechanical-type shikigami that were twice smaller in size, one of them had stopped moving due to Natsume's thunder attack. After seeing Hummer rushed out, Tsuchigumo's reaction seems to imply what else appeared at this time, but it did not slow down at all, rushed into the tunnel.

“Tenma!”

“Hama! Turn around!”

Hummer with a large body, applied emergency brakes immediately, skidding on the road with a tilt, crossing with the Tsuchigumo. Natsume's vision flew towards the man in black on top of the Tsuchigumo. "--!" Just as she widened her eyes, Hummer had already turned around.

Then, the three mechanical-type shikigamis that was chasing the Tsuchigumo approached closer, Hummer once again revved its loud engine, using its strong turn to propel the car forward, rushing into the tunnel that it came out from, chasing after the Tsuchigumo.

"That isn't Harutora!" Natsume shouted. "What?" Touji bellowed from behind. Other than Tenma who was seated in the driver's seat and Natsume who was seated in the co-driver's seat, there's Touji, Kyouko and Shizuka, a total of five passengers in the vehicle.

Natsume turned towards the back seat.

"The aura is different! The figure is different as well."

"Who else could that be?"

"Let's discuss this later on, that thing is coming!"

Shizuka stared behind and shouted, she stood up, tossing out large number of talismans behind Hummer. The talismans form into an origami shikigami that was created by Shizuka, blocking the entrance of the tunnel, the mechanical-type shikigamis which entered the tunnel chasing the Tsuchigumo rushed forward.

The army of shikigamis restricted the movements of the mechanical-types, however, the mechanical-types did not slow down because of that. They either pushed away or destroyed the shikigamis, closing towards them.

"Damn it, we are unlucky to come across those mechanical-types—and what the hell is that! It's basically a robot!"

"Is that [Colonel]?"

"That's probably him! Really, since when did he got his hands on such troublesome things?"

Shizuka replied Kyouko in a reproaching manner, Hummer was now right behind Tsuchigumo.

Running with such a large body, the entire tunnel shook. Natsume stood up from the co-driver's seat, her long hair tied with a ribbon whipped in the wind.

She placed her hand on the top of the windscreen, observed the back of the Tsuchigumo with focus in the dark tunnel.

Then, “— First seal, release!” Once Hokuto's seal was released, “I'm sorry, I will go over for a moment.” After finishing her words to her surprised partners, she jumped off with a surge of dragon aura.

She first jumped onto the engine cover of Hummer, then she made a huge leap forward, onto the Tsuchigumo.

Due to the unstable landing surface, she let her knee touched the ground. Voices of discontent from her comrades could be heard from behind, but she simply couldn't ignore it.

She raised her head while kneeling, the man in black felt her presence, turned towards her. To prevent falling, the other party had used a rope to tie himself to the machine. That person placed his hand on the shoulder of the warrior, letting out a small gasp of surprise as he turned around.

The tone of that person was rather casual, it makes people wonder if he understands the current situation.

“It's been awhile, Tsuchimikado Natsume. I don't think you remember me, right?”

That person began to exchange greetings with Natsume, however, that person had guessed wrong, Natsume remembered that doll-like face, she had heard from her friends about her [real identity] as well.

“Saotome Ryou--!”

“Yes... To think you would remember me. The last time we met was at... umm... ah ah, we haven't met since that time in Ueno, when your tutor was hospitalised. You have such an amazing memory.”

Saotome spoke with admiration, but this wasn't the time for a casual talk.

"Where is Harutora? He isn't here?"

Saotome has a rather important connection with Harutora's awakening, her comrades had often discussed the two of them disappeared at the same time, the possibility of her working with Harutora is very high. Looking at her commanding Harutora's [Armoured Juggernauts], what Natsume and the rest presumed was indeed right.

However, Saotome's reaction was not something Natsume expects. Compared to Natsume's words, her determined expression touched Saotome more. "I'm sorry." Saotome spoke in sincerity that was seldom.

"I am the bait, even though I do have a place that I need to go."

"Kanda Myoujin, right?"

"Yes."

"That means Harutora is there as well?"

"Should be. We had been moving separately for some time, I, too, do not know where he is right now."

Upon hearing Saotome's explanation, Natsume's expression turned grim.

Why is it that we always brush past each other? However, I shouldn't be defeated because of this. Harutora will appear in Kanda Myoujin, attaining this information should be considered as a gain.

"I shall go over first! Later on, we will—"

"Wait a minute."

"Eh?"

"You cannot go over."

“What?”

Hearing such an overbearingly direct declaration, Natsume cannot but suspected her own ears for a moment.

“Why?”

“I cannot say, it’s just that something bad will happen if you go.”

Saotome spoke calmly, her tone was kept as calm as possible, with her feelings fully excluded. On the other hand, Natsume couldn’t control her anger surged by reflex, she scolded with the words from her heart.

“Why? You do not have any rights to tell me such things.”

Saotome took the scolding silently, “... That’s true.” She spoke softly.

“I cannot stop you.”

“.....”

Saotome looked straight back at Natsume’s glare, and spoke with a gentle smile.

“Harutora would probably know about this as well. How would fate move, how it would relate, no one knows, no matter Harutora or me, or even Tsuchimikado Yakou.”

Natsume couldn’t understand a word Saotome was saying, she only knew one thing, Saotome wasn’t speaking with malice, she was truly worried when she told her [not to go]. But, why? Why, even the reason behind she wouldn’t tell her, things had already developed to this point, all the things were so pressing.

Feelings of anger, insecurity and the unknown premonition crossed paths, swirling in her heart. Natsume couldn’t say anything, yet she couldn’t look away from her, just looking back into Saotome’s eyes.

Then, Tsuchigumo exited the tunnel, Hummer followed closely behind. All of the sudden, Shizuka yelled at Natsume from the passenger seat...

“Natsume-chan, in front of you!”

She jumped and looked over, there was a figure mid-air in front of her. Tsuchigumo quickly evaded the figure that was leaping towards them, the figure that Tsuchigumo had evaded destroyed the asphalt road upon landing, turned his head towards Tsuchigumo.

“— That’s not him, was it really a bait?”

That was a young man, Natsume remembered his looks, in fact, he was one of the opponents they had faced a few days ago, Takiko’s guardian.

“Kumomaru?”

“Tsuchimikado Natsume? Looks like I won’t return empty-handed.”

Kumomaru immediately rush towards Tsuchigumo, alongside with Hummer. “Tsk.” Touji pulled off his hairband, removing the first level seal that was placed on his body, Shizuka’s movements were fluid, Kyouko hastily took out talismans.

At this moment, the [Colonel’s] three mechanical-type shikigamis breach through Shizuka’s shikigamis, rushed out of the tunnel. Even though he was feeling suspicious about the unknown challenger, but he still rushed over for the sake of restraining the Tsuchigumo.

At the exit of Yotsuya Yonchome, the Hummer of Natsume’s party, Saotome’s [Armoured Juggernaut], Kumomaru and three units of mechanical-type shikigamis, these various forces observed each other, trying to make out who is ally and who is foe.

In that brief moment of encounter, countless ideas were exchanged.

The first one to move was— “Whatever, it’s not something that should be left alone anyway.” Kumomaru launched an attack on Natsume. He kicked off the ground and jumped towards the running Tsuchigumo. Natsume increased the power of the thunder spell, yellow electricity surrounds her body. Touji, who had released the first seal, grabbed the support as he prepare to jump out of Hummer.

However, it was at this moment—

“I won’t allow you!”

A barrier attacked towards them. Kumomaru got slammed by the spell barrier, deviated from his jumping path. “Uh!” He clenched his teeth, readjusted his stance.

A motorcycle rush in from the side, the motorcycle carried a man and a woman rushing into the fierce battle.

That was Yuge Mari and Yamashiro Hayato.

What was surprising was that Natsume recognised the motorcycle that the two were on, that was Kogure’s. “It was actually you guys!” Kumomaru widened his eyes in anger. Hummer and [Armour Juggernaut] ignored Kumomaru who was being slowed down and rushed to the exit, following behind was Yamashiro’s motorcycle, and following them closely was the three mechanical-type shikigami units.

After the mechanical-types confirmed Yuge and Yamashiro’s identity, their movements slowed down.

Yuge’s group rode the motorcycle to the side of Hummer, “We are here to help!” Yuge, who was seated at the back, lean her body out and shouted.

“You guys are too slow!”

“Dairenji Shizuka! And the living spirit, you too— you guys are really working together with Chief Amami! Was the Shikigami just now Souma’s?”

“You guys took action without understanding what was going on? Yes, that was Souma’s, let me remind you, that is a very difficult guy.”

As if validating Touji’s words, a loud noise of destruction came from the back. Looking over, one of the three mechanical-type units was destroyed, Yuge, who looked over, was speechless.



To ordinary shikigamis without physical body, mechanical-type shikigamis are troublesome. The opponent had destroyed the mechanical-type shikigami effortlessly, this was something unusual. Yamashiro who was holding on the grips ascertained through the rear mirror, “Uh!” He gasped.

“What a powerful aura... Is that the shikigami that fought with Kogure-san!”

“It seems like he was the only one that came over here. How? Should we battle him?” Just as Touji was getting determined, “No.” Natsume landed on the frame of Hummer after jumping from Tsuchigumo.

Yuge and Yamashiro looked at her body surrounded by dragon aura in silence, especially Yamashiro who had fought Natsume before was even more suspicious if he was wrong, as he admired Natsume as her hair whipped with the wind. “We are now heading towards Kanda Myoujin!-- Independent Office Yuge, and... Mystical Investigator Yamashiro, the [Armoured Juggernaut] is on our side, that mechanical-type shikigami shouldn’t lift its hands against you two. Can we leave this to you?”

Facing the older [Twelve Divine Generals], Natsume displayed a tone without explanation, Tenma and Kyouko were shocked, Shizuka was snickering with pride, Touji grinned as well.

Soon after—

“On, Gozu, Daiba, Seigan, Zuiki, Enmei, Sowaka!”

Kumomaru recited the True Words, placed both his hands on the ground. An explosive amount of Yin energy was injected into the ground, as if the asphalt road underwent very high temperatures, it began to bubble and melt.

Miasma began to spread, as if a continuous dynamic spiritual disaster created with simple technique. That was a level three spiritual disaster [Chimera Type], Kumomaru had showed this power during the fight against Kogure as well. However, it seems like the ley lines have been affected by the altar, the number was higher than last time, moreover, it was developing into level four spiritual disaster

soon.

A frightening scene.

Yet, this was something that straight away sparked the fighting spirit of the [Twelve Divine Generals], especially Independent Officer Yuge, Shigeoka as well.

In the hearts of the exorcists that are loyal to the Exorcist Bureau, it was so deeply engrained that their [mission] was to exorcise spiritual disasters, any one who creates spiritual disasters were, without a doubt, [enemies].

The remaining two mechanical-type shikigamis stopped the chase, changing their course towards battling the spiritual disaster. Yuge's eyes turned sharp upon seeing the situation.

“— Understood.” Just as she replied, a [Chimera-type] pounced over the mechanical-type shikigami, attacking the Hummer from above. Yuge strike with a sword seal without even chanting the spell, the spiritual disaster was caught in mid-air immediately before falling on to the ground.

Yamashiro pulled the brakes and turned the motorcycle around.

“Go!”

Yuge shouted while the motorcycle rushed into the massive amount of spiritual disaster.

Saotome looked towards Natsume and nodded as well, making the Tsuchigumo take aim at the [Chimera-types] too.

“—Tenma!”

“Alright!”

Hummer sped up, Natsume closed her lips tightly, feeling the increase in speed.

Even though she was warned not to go over, but she really cannot accept the instructions this time.

Natsume's group back faced the battlefield, continued rushing to the other battlefield.

## Part 3

In the sky of the city, there was a three-legged crow flying.

[Looking] over, magic lines and ley lines flooded the entire city, the altar of [Tensou Chifu Ritual] had formed into a massively complicated yet vivid pattern, it looked as if a mandala was created using magic.

The god's territory had expanded, merging the hidden world and real world into one, a magical stage to call down [god]. At this moment in terms of aura, it could be said that Tokyo had seemingly become a different world.

In a certain meaning, this was something rather yearning. The spirit of magic, a large experimental ground that was pushed close to the unknown realm, it makes people yearning yet painful, however, now it's not the time to be immersed in such sentiments.

The golden bird flew carefully for a long time in the sky, the altar had caused nearby spiritual phase to mutate, this had, of course, affected the magic. Moreover, there were other spells flowing in, some areas continually had distorted auras became stabilised. He tried to grasp the changes nearby as much as possible-- as well as how the [battle] developed.

However, this job was nearly done.

A faint glow of tangerine on the far west, the sky was dyed in the colour of night. The moon made its appearance, the bright and clear moon looked over the scene below its lonely self.

Ochanomizu.

It looked as if the golden bird tore the moonlight apart with its wings, turning in an acute angle. Then, it glided directly towards a certain target.

It flew pass Hijiri Bridge at an angle, passing over the skies of

Kandagawa, towards the center of the altar— closing in to Kanda Myoujin. The Torri that leads to the road towards the shrine appeared in their view. The golden bird spread its wings suddenly, extending its three legs, slowing down in mid-air.

It turned its body with ease, landing in front of the Torri— in a simple style, the gable and hip structured tile rooftop. That was the Great Hall of Yushima Seidou, statues of Kigintou, dragon head with a fish body figure were worshiped on the both sides of the roof. The Kiriyuushi Divine Beasts were worshiped in the form of Komainu Statues at the four corners.

The golden bird landed on the roof with the divine beast, transforming into a black clothed Onmyouji in the next second. There was only Hongo Dori Road in between his position and the Torii of Kanda Myoujin, there were no obstructions in between. Another thing would be due to the effects of the barrier, there wasn't any people and cars on the road, there was only a car that looked like its been abandoned at the side of the Torri.

However, right below the cold and silent Torri, stands a small man in a priest robe.

The man gazed towards the Onmyouji on the rooftop of the Great Hall, taking a step forward.

"It's been a while, Tsuchimikado Harutora-kun. ...Although you might not remember me at all. After all, you were in quite some trouble at the time."

"...Independent Officer Miyachi. Well, regrettably, I don't remember you. But I know of you. I've heard of your 'Fire Demon' moniker many times."

The two of them were talking about the incident during the summer two years ago when Natsume lost her life. At that time, Harutora had been captured by the Exorcist Bureau and sent to the Mystical Investigators. Miyachi had been present at the time.

The student who had lost his childhood friend and been possessed by his out-of-control shikigami, and the most powerful of the Exorcist

Bureau Twelve Divine Generals who was in charge of exorcising spiritual disasters. Back then, who would have thought that these two would have faced each other like this?

...This is quite incredible indeed.....

Harutora harrowed his lone eye as he stood in front of Miyachi.

'I'm confident in my spiritual power', Harutora thought as he steadied himself. After all, even during his sealed time as a student, his strong spiritual power had been the only thing everyone else had recognized. Now that he had obtained the spirit-seeing ability and recovered his past memories, he was familiar with releasing and manipulating spiritual power. He wasn't a bit beneath other Onmyouji in terms of simple brute strength.

But Harutora wasn't so conceited to think he could beat the man in front of him.

A short middle-aged man, shorter than Harutora, with thick and disorderly hair and a beard that covered his face. He wore a long robe and looked listless.

But inside that short body was a tremendous spiritual power surpassing what an Onmyouji should have. Harutora was stunned by that immeasurably deep spiritual power.

Fire Demon Miyachi, accepted and feared by famous Onmyouji as the strongest of the era.

But what Harutora wanted to know the most wasn't his true power.

"...Independent Officer Miyachi, I wanted to ask you a long time ago."

"Hm, what."

"Why you joined Kurahashi."

Harutora stared at Miyachi with a sharp gaze as he spoke.

"You have no relations with the Souma or the Kurahashi families. Nor do they have a hold of any weakness of yours, and it doesn't feel like

you're being tricked. Also, it doesn't seem like you really admire them. You're a stoic, calm person. I think you're more capable of looking objectively at what you're doing than the Souma or the Kurahashi."

"...Thanks, it's quite humbling to be told that by you."

"So... why?"

Harutora bluntly asked the obfuscating Miyachi.

"With that kind of strength, you could openly oppose both the Souma and the Kurahashi. As an exorcist, as the leader of the exorcists, you obtained your ideal job. Most exorcists are working hard while looking up to you. Almost all your subordinates rely on you, and aren't you admired by everyone? So why, why did you betray everyone!?"

Though his tone was very flat, Harutora continued pursuing the question. In this kind of situation, he wouldn't allow any dodging the question or changing the topic. Miyachi scratched his head silently as he thought of how to reply.

Then, he replied: "In the past..... My power went out of control."

Harutora furrowed his brows in surprise.

"No, to be honest, I don't know how to answer. I wanted to die but couldn't, and I probably went crazy. Back then, the Chief saved me..... but in the end what I'm saying is just an excuse. Right now, I probably feel like nothing matters. Although I'm not completely dead, I'm no different from dead. I'm just going with the flow."

Miyachi said in a frank, sincere tone.

An evocative expression appeared on his clearly-outlined, gloomy face. It made him seem like an experienced actor burdened by many ghosts of the past rather than a noble knight. All that he showed was a learned sorrow, and on top of that, an immeasurable emotionlessness. Maybe this was a kind of enlightenment.

But,

"In that case..."

Harutora's tone grew stronger.

"Then you're an incredible bastard..... But I sympathize with you. There's nothing good about having great power."

Harutora slowly swept his right hand to the side at the end, as if talking to himself.

Defensive shikigami materialized to his left and right, leaving Harutora in the middle. Hishamaru, who stood on the roof wearing a military outfit, and Kakugyouki, who stood one-legged on the roof with his left sleeve flapping in the wind. The beautiful fox spirit and the one-armed ogre let out strange lights from their eyes as they looked at Miyachi and said,

"The Fire Demon Miyachi - not a bad opponent."

"...Well, let me witness your strength."

Miyachi exhaled quietly. The beads in his hand clacked.

They had always been members of opposite factions. There was nothing left to say, so this was all they could do.

Harutora looked at the shrine road and at Zuishin-mon<sup>[14]</sup> built on the slopes of Kanda Shrine. A dull darkness covered the entrance to the gate, and he couldn't see anything at all inside. It was because a barrier covered the altar's surroundings.

He couldn't see at all.

Since he couldn't see, he would have to charge straight in, and therefore he needed to eliminate any obstacles.

"Hishamaru! Kakugyouki!"

Receiving their master's order, the two defensive shikigami gracefully leaped.

Hishamaru jumped into the air, and Kakugyouki jumped to the road,



separating into two in order to deal with Miyachi.

"Nomaku Saraba Dadakyanaiyaku Saraba Bonkeibyaku Sarabada Darada Seida Makaroshada Ken Gyakigyaki Saraba Biginnan Undarada Kanman--"

He recited Vajrapani's[15] most fundamental great dharani[16], Acala's Fire Realm Magic.

Fire Realm was General Onmyoudou.

It was one of General Onmyoudou's representative offensive magics most commonly used when exorcising mobile spiritual disasters.

But the level of Miyachi's magic was completely different.

Gigantic magical energy poured forth from Miyachi's body, raging into a magical flame with him at its center. The flame instantly covered the road, scorching the buildings and turning the nearby area into a sea of flame.

The last time he saw this flame was that summer night[17]. The flame had completely covered the Onmyou Agency building in order to fight back against Ashiya Doman. He had only glimpsed it through a window at the time, and now that he was seeing the flame of the Fire Demon before his eyes, there were no words to describe it other than 'shocking'.

"Tch!"

Kakugyouki guarded his face with his right arm and stopped as the flame engulfed him. 'Lag', which happened when shikigami suffered powerful attacks, made his body unstable and his hair stand on end as if he were a television image receiving interference. Hishamaru, who was flying up in the air, was also cried out and moved her tail in response to the wave of heat pouring forth from below.

A blinding light and deafening noise, along with a suppressing heat. Harutora immediately put up a barrier, and though he was a good distance away, he knew that an ordinary barrier wouldn't be able to handle this. The flame produced by the Fire Realm Magic of General Onmyoudou burned spirits better than ordinary flame and had

minimal power against physical objects, but it was already starting to melt the asphalt on the ground. The surrounding buildings started burning one by one and the creeping flame produced more and more heat.

In front of the torii that flashed blue and white amidst the flame, Miyachi chanted the incantation with his eyes half-open.

".....I see, you're coming out and fighting at the vanguard."

A practitioner with this much power couldn't be placed in the middle of an altar where a complex ritual was being carried out. This powerful flame would burn away the altar's ritual as well. In addition, even the area outside of the shrine road was currently in Miyachi's 'area of consciousness'. He could burn everything before him to a crisp at will.

...This wasn't a realm that could be entered through training, it was like something divine - a god-given ability.

In the past, he had known someone similar to this man. Someone who overflowed with individual 'ability' - practically a fountainhead of spiritual power linked directly to the world itself. Practitioners like this were very few. The head of Seishuku Temple before had been such a person, and to be fair he had in the past been a similar kind of practitioner.

But Miyachi was an exceptional example even among this group of practitioners.

...His He himself was something like a fountainhead of power. It hadn't happened by Miyachi's own will. But one day, he had suddenly felt a fountain of strength pour forth inside his body.

A strength that allowed him to burn everything before him to a crisp if he had the mind to. No, more than that - it might just burn everything to a crisp if he weren't careful and didn't have the power to control it.

Miyachi had once let this strength go out of control.

He once again felt the weight of those words.

But,

".....I can't just sit here and let you burn."

He had also experienced pain going out of control. And it had been an extraordinary pain that others had never experienced. To make up for it, he couldn't let someone else make the same mistake. He wouldn't let someone else distort the truth of the world - especially not for their own biased views.

Stopping this was the responsibility he bore for his sin--

...No.

Harutora shook his head.

...No, that wasn't it. Tsuchimikado Harutora!

Harutora swiftly abandoned that righteous, obscuring view.

He knew that he had to stop the Souma. He knew that he had to defeat the Kurahashi. He knew that he couldn't let the Tensouchi Ritual be performed in the modern era, and had no plans at all of asking forgiveness for dragging the others into this.

But in his heart, there was a simpler, purer reason why he definitely couldn't back down.

...Natsume.....

If the ritual completed and the god descended, Tokyo's spiritual face would be changed. Natsume definitely wouldn't be able to handle it in her current state. So he had to stop it.

In order to save Natsume, he had to communicate with ancestral spirits. And he needed the 'Full Moon' in order to communicate with ancestral spirits, so he needed to take Akino back.

Natsume and the others had taken actions necessary to defeat the Souma and Kurahashi. But they hadn't bared their fangs. The reason to fight inside his heart was central to his thinking and couldn't be touched. This, too, was an opinionated bias. But it was the truth to

him. That truth could be gathered up into a single sentence.

Natsume, I'll become your shikigami.

He had once promised this.

Protecting the master was a shikigami's duty.

That was why he called himself Harutora, and not Tsuchimikado Yakou.

I can't lose.

"Hishamaru, circle around behind him! Kakugyouki, push back!"

After giving his order, Harutora swiftly raised his own magical energy.

The nearby buildings ignited one after another. Hishamaru used the burning roofs as stepping stones and began to move. On the other hand, Kakugyouki couldn't help but smile wryly at his master's ruthless order.

"Talking to me like that again..... That hasn't changed after your reincarnation, huh."

Kakugyouki complained, but he leaped into the sea of flame and released his demonic aura.

This time, it was Miyachi's turn to stare.

The one-armed oni bared his fangs. Thick demonic aura exploded out.

The demonic aura was burned by the flame and purified immediately after it was released. Instantly. But for that instant, just a single instant, it extended slightly. The demonic aura began spreading outside of where the flame burned, centered on the oni.

The eyes that were often narrowed snapped open. His short golden hair grew and lengthened, becoming messy as it fluttered in the flame. His huge, two-meter body swelled and swelled again, as if

power were flooding into his body.

As he stood in the sea of flame, the oni who had lived for a thousand years showed his true nature. Kakugyouki took a heavy step on the melted asphalt.

"Graah!"

Baring his fangs, the oni bellowed ominously. He took a heavy second step towards the Onmyouji in the center of the flame.

Then, he swung a fist.

Miyachi reflexively re-formed his hand seal. Flame gathered in front of him - but that flame was instantly scattered by the tsunami of demonic aura being released by the fist.

A fierce, head-on battle between the god-given flame and the ancient demonic aura. Rough shockwaves spread to the surroundings, splitting open and collapsing the burning buildings around them.

The roaring swirl of magical energy blew around the surrounding aura. At the same time, part of the Tensouchi Ritual altar collapsed.

"Incredible!"

Miyachi said. He wore a rare childish expression.

"That's my line."

Kakugyouki said.

"I've been drifting through this world for a thousand years now, but haven't met someone of this level. I ought to use everything I have to deal with you."

He took a third step.

The fist that went out again whipped up a gale of misama. Miyachi's flame burned even more exuberantly, flapping in the gale and spreading waves of heat. Kakugyouki slowly closed the distance amidst the wild flame and misama. But Miyachi didn't take a single

step back. The closer the oni got, the denser the space was and the heavier the oni's next step became. He couldn't believe that a human was responsible for this kind of magical output.

On the other hand, Harutora still hadn't moved. He was still refining his magical energy, trusting in his defensive familiars. He could only use this kind of 'special move' once against an expert like Miyachi. The plan to wait for 'that moment' to come had already begun, and time passed at a snail's pace.

Then, finally, Kakugyouki stopped.

The compressed flame attacked the oni, burning his skin.

But,

"Hifimiyoimune, kotomochiorane, shikiruyuitoha, sobatamakumeka!"

A clear voice recited the words of the Hikime ritual. When Miyachi looked back to see behind him, Hishamaru had already circled behind him and was in an archery stance, readying foxfire.

Release.

Miyachi released of his hand seal and swung the prayer beads in his hands. The beads, entwined with Miyachi's magical energy, just barely deflected the foxfire.

But in the moment that Miyachi's focus was shifted, Kakugyouki purhsed through the flame. With a fanged grin, he leaped out at Miyachi, who controlled his flame to knock the oni back down.

Things quickly became chaotic.

"Daniyada udakadaibana enkeienkei sowaka!"

Hishamaru chanted Varuna's mantra and magical energy formed a stream of water that attacked Miyachi's flame. Steam swelled up explosively, producing a thunderous roar.

Hishamaru's magical energy couldn't compare to the monstrous

Miyachi and Kakugyouki. But it could help while the two of them were locked in a stalemate. In fact, you could even say that Hishamaru's actions decided the flow of this battle.

The two defensive shikigami constantly attacked Miyachi from in front of him and behind him. But Miyachi didn't fall, as they were unable to land a deciding strike without an overwhelming advantage. On the other hand, Miyachi fought hard with his clothes disarray and clacking prayer beads, as if playing with the two defensive shikigami. The manipulated flame became knights that protected their master, trying to burn the cunning fox spirit and the vicious oni as they danced with radiant swords.

If he wanted to, he could turn this area into a fiery hell. Part of the altar would also burn up like paper as the area of the inferno spread.

Harutora sharpened his mind. The defensive shikigami were fighting against Miyachi's power. He knew that Takiko couldn't move. Yashamaru was focusing on undoing the curse. Also, Kumomaru was heading to the location of the Armored Juggernaut, as he had determined while observing from the sky.

The key to the battle was time. The trap Harutora had laid, and the curse that Yashamaru would undo at some point. With that, he had no time to sit still.

Ultimately, what was the best course of action?

"Hishamaru!"

Harutora shouted. Hishamaru's ears immediately stood up. She turned in midair by swinging her tail, and right after she landed, a huge lioness attacked her.

A white lion with a beautiful mane. And also, a black lion and a man wearing sokutai came through Zuishin-mon from inside the closed-off darkness of Kanda Shrine.

Kurahashi Genji.

"Chief!?"

"Miyachi, suppress the oni! ...Hakuma! Kuroun!"

The black lion next to him leaped off the ground down to the shrine road as soon as he commanded, joining the white lion to attack Hishamaru. Hishamaru spun her body, stepping off of the wall of a burning building to leap into the air to flee. But the two lions leaped into the air after her.

"You!"

Hishamaru glared at the lions. Hakuma and Kuroun were defensive shikigami passed down along the Kurahashi Onmyoudou family.

Loyal shikigami that protected the head of the family from outside enemies. They had fought with Hishamaru before while they had served Tsuchimikado Yakou.

They were extremely reliable allies, but they were tough opponents.

"Hishamaru."

"I'm alright!"

Hishamaru replied to her master as she leaped through the air. Blue foxfire guided by her tail traced out arcs that singed the noses of the approaching lions.

But the lions were uncowed. Hishamaru swung her tail as she controlled her spiritual power, jumping to higher ground.

Kakugyouki clicked his tongue. He stared at the two lions in the air and clenched a fist.

But,

"Oh my, I'm being ignored."

Miyachi's flame shot forth from in front of him. "Ugh." Kakugyouki's giant body was blown away.

The flame instantly burned away the miasma floating in the air.



Then, seeing the opportunity, Kurahashi refined his spiritual power.

"Now, let's get rid of them!"

"Understood."

Kurahashi sucked in a breath even before hearing Miyachi's response. "Tagamagaharaama tsunorito no futonorito wo machi kakamunondemu. Exorcise and cleanse all things!"

He chanted the highest-level exorcism spell and clapped his hands together. A blinding aura burst forth, and at the same time, Miyachi manipulated the raging flame and drew it back.

Kurahashi's magic passed through the shrine road, purifying all of the chaotic aura, miasma, foxfire, and flame at once.

It didn't crush everything using force, but rather saw through the balance of the five elements and used the requisite aura to supplement the necessary areas, stilling and regulating everything.

Hishamaru was stunned by that excellent technique as she evaded the lions. Harutora was also taken aback. There were extremely few Onmyouji who could perform this kind of feat. This kind of technique could only be grasped by constantly practicing to perfectly regulate the balance of the five Onmyou elements over an extremely long time.

The moment the battlefield was purified, Kurahashi started a chant. He was repairing the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual altar, which had been damaged in the magic battle. At the same time, Yashamaru was also cleansing the altar's contamination. They couldn't just sit still and watch holes open up.

Right, they couldn't ignore this. They couldn't possibly have ignored this.

He had been waiting for this opportunity.

As the altar was returned to normal, magical energy flowed through it and into the spirit flow.

Inside that flowing spirit flow was a trap Harutora had laid - imprisoning magic. He rapidly drew it out and modified the preset settings of the spell as he strode into the battlefield.

His target was Miyachi.

While the defensive shikigami had been fighting, Harutora had sprinkled the magical tool hidden by his feet - a rock wrapped in bamboo leaves - with salt.

"By the green of these bamboo leaves, by the withering of these bamboo leaves, let green die! And by the drought of this salt, wither! And by the weight of these rocks, sink!"

The secret art that Ohtomo had used against Ashiya Doman before, the 'Eight-way Bamboo Cage Curse'.

Harutora's magic guided the magical energy lines and spirit flow of the repaired altar to become a prison that caged Miyachi. Miyachi was shut in the cage along with the flame around him, and inside were powerful curses - various curses that Harutora brought through the spirit flow using his magic.

The interior of the cage instantly became a crucible of curses and flame.

"What!?"

Shocked, Miyachi turned his flame into a shield. The Fire Demon's flame constantly burned the mass of curses that had been gathered from all of Tokyo.

Miyachi couldn't move in that narrow space, and burning the curses alone exhausted him.

"Miyachi!"

Kurahashi shouted, clenching his fists.

But Kurahashi couldn't do anything.

Even Kurahashi with his full power couldn't destroy the cage formed

by the magical energy lines and spirit flow.

With the spiritual power lines and spirit flow cut, the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual altar also stopped its work. His plans had ground to a halt.

There was only one thing left that he could do - to remove the rock beneath Harutora's feet from the spell. Of course, Harutora wouldn't let him do that.

...Good!

Harutora had realized before the battle that the Fire Demon, called the strongest of the Twelve Divine Generals, would be a hindrance.

He wouldn't possibly have not come with countermeasures for the Onmyouji who had faced Ashiya Doman alone.

This was the countermeasure that Harutora had prepared to remove the Fire Demon from the board.

Kakugyouki!

"Yeah."

The moment Harutora shouted, Kakugyouki returned to the battlefield from where he had been blown away to.

Ignoring the trapped Miyachi, he walked to the sloped shrine road.

Simply coming close to this demonic aura made Kurahashi feel incredibly pressured.

Kurahashi kept his guard up, his expression grim, but the initiative was already Harutora's. Until he thought of something he could do, he could only combat Kakugyouki's demonic aura.

Harutora couldn't give Kurahashi an opportunity.

"Hishamaru!"

"Yes!"

Hishamaru gracefully dropped from the air and leaped over the

shrine road. Kakugyouki blasted Hakuma and Kuroun from behind with demonic aura, temporarily stopping them and preventing them from pursuing Hishamaru.

...Now...

Kumomaru wasn't here right now. Yashamaru couldn't move because of the altar, and Takiko was defenseless inside the altar. As long as Hishamaru broke through Kurahashi, Harutora's victory was essentially guaranteed.

...They could do it!

At least Harutora thought.

A slash that could cut through everything passed by Hishamaru and cut the shrine road into two.

Hishamaru screamed, blown away by the slash's spiritual pressure. Kurahashi was almost sent flying as well. The sleeves of his sokutai flapped in the raging wind.

"...What!?"

Harutora yelled.

This fearsome sword skill was no worse than Kogure's. But this wasn't Kogure. A Divine General carrying a large sword appeared on the battlefield with an ominous grin.

"Kagami!"

Harutora growled.

Kagami stared at Harutora.

"...Yo."

An insufferably arrogant smile appeared on his face.

Hastily regaining her footing, Hishamaru appeared in front of Zuishin-mon, staring at Kagami in disbelief.

...Was this... truly Kagami?

One of the Twelve Divine Generals. Independence Exorcist, the 'Ogre Eater' Kagami Reiji. Someone who had been involved with all of Harutora, Hishamaru, and Kakugyouki.

In particular, to Hishamaru he was the sworn enemy who had wounded her master's left eye.

But the man before them was completely different from the Kagami of the past. His outer appearance hadn't changed. But internally - the nature of the aura inside his body had changed dramatically. The chaotic aura frothing inside his body didn't seem like something a human ought to have. It was like boiling magma.

To be honest, it was strange that he was still alive.

It felt like he was forcefully suppressing it. Perhaps it was even less stable than Hishamaru's condition.

Even so, he was still able to use such a powerful strength - it was a strength that felt comparable to Miyachi's.

His limiter had been removed!?

That's what it felt like.

"Hishamaru!"

Kakugyouki shouted. Hishamaru came to her senses and instantly jumped in front of her comrade. Kagami didn't pursue.

He was panting, as if he had no stamina. His condition looked extremely poor.

But Hishamaru had goosebumps from confronting him. The current Kagami had some abnormal condition and gave off an extremely dangerous feeling.

On the other hand,

"Kagami... You..."

Kurahashi was also shocked into silence by Kagami's transformation. Kagami panted as he swept a scornful gaze over Kurahashi.

"Not bad, Chief. It was better than I would have thought. Those guys who've been fooled until now will definitely be surprised."

".....The seal's been broken, but that appearance..."

Kagami cackled at the dumbstruck Kurahashi.

"I honestly thought I was gonna die. I couldn't even use Far Step, so I ended up arriving late to the party....."

Kagami turned his body as he spoke, looking at the guarded Hishamaru and Kakugyouki in the middle of the shrine road. In addition to Hishamaru and Kakugyouki, he stared at Harutora in the distance of Yushima Seidou.

Kagami laughed madly.

"Right, I'm me, I do what I want."

Saying that, he looked back at Kurahashi.

Kurahashi had already called his two defensive shikigami back to him. The giant lions were as tall as Kurahashi's shoulders. Just by standing there, they evoked instinctive fear - but Kagami was the side with more pressure.

But Kagami very quickly turned to Harutora and swung a katana.

".....Well, this is rare, so you're first."

Thick aura floated around Kagami. His body leaning slightly forward, Kagami bared his teeth and stared at Hishamaru and the others.

"Bastard!" Hishamaru's fur rose.

But,

"Alright."

Kakugyouki walked forward without hesitation.

He released his full-power demonic aura without holding back a single bit. His every step crushed the ground of the shrine road and the vast magical energy whipped up a roaring wind. Hishamaru unconsciously guarded herself against the shockwaves.

"Hah!"

Kagami snickered, stabbing Higekiri between his feet and roaring.

Spiritual power shot forth.

It was practically unbelievable. Truly, it was a strength comparable to Miyachi's. Kagami refined his magical energy and poured it into Higekiri. Higekiri gave off a silver light and formed a huge blade, slashing open the poring demonic aura.

Kakugyouki's waterfall of demonic aura was completely cleansed. Hishamaru was shocked into silence. Kakugyouki clicked his tongue.

"Our compatibility's still this bad, huh. That's what happens when something gets your spiritual affinity."

Kakugyouki bared his teeth, lightly swinging his arm.

...I see, that guy's sword.....

Kagami's sword Higekiri was from the Heian era, the blade used by the samurai Watanabe no Tsuna. The name Higekiri came from the legend that he had used it to fight an oni. The legend said that Higekiri had cut off that oni's left arm.

That oni's name was Ibaraki-doji. That was one of the names Kakugyouki had used in the past.

"Sorry about before, but it'll be a long time before things get better."

Kagami laughed as he readied Higekiri.

"But this guy's in excellent condition right now. Well, it kind of feels like he's out of control. Why don't you have a bout with me."

Kagami raised Higekiri as he said that. Kakugyouki grunted.

"Kakugyouki!?"

Kagami refined his powerful magical energy, poured it into the blade, and threw it out.

When Kakugyouki's demonic aura swelled up, the thrown Hige-kiri danced in midair and a young man holding Hige-kiri's hilt materialized.

This man with messy wavy hair and wearing a joyful, arrogant expression was Hige-kiri's vessel Shaver, Kagami's shikigami.

"Yaaaah!"

Shaver swung down Hige-kiri while emitting a strange cry. Kakugyouki dodged an instant before he was cut, but the explosive sword pressure produced lag all over his body. Hishamaru hastily guarded herself as the sword pressure pushed her back.

"Remember this!"

Shaver bellowed. His flashing eyes were filled with killing intent and locked on to his target Kakugyouki without moving away.

"You even messed around with me before! Die! I'll kill you, Ibaraki-doji!"

He charged forward, laughing wildly and hunched over so far that he was almost crawling on four limbs. He swung his large katana rapidly. Kakugyouki's giant body leaped up agilely. He avoided the swift blade while suppressing Shaver using demonic aura and looking for an opportunity to strike.

Slashes continuously split the night sky as the blade's magical energy and the oni's demonic aura raged.

The demonic aura became a whirl that exploded out with a roundhouse kick. Sharp lag spread over Shaver's body, but the shikigami joyfully stabbed out with his sword, too impatient to wait to recover from the lag. Kakugyouki clicked his tongue once again and deflected the sword using the armor on his arm. With the differences in stature, the battle between Kakugyouki and Shaver felt like the



fight between a bull and a matador.

The fight was evenly matched, but Kakugyouki, who was known for his power, was avoiding a head-on clash. The bad affinity seemed to be true.

...Not good!

Hishamaru formed a hand seal, planning to cover him.

But,

"Hishamaru!"

Just as Harutora called out from behind her, Kagami's Fire Realm magic attacked. Fire Realm magic without speaking an incantation and essentially without any preparation. But this Fire Realm magic contained magical energy approaching Miiyachi's. Hishamaru's expression changed as she just barely jumped up. She realized her mistake only after jumping.

"You and I still aren't done yet. Let me get back at you for before."

Kagami controlled the fire, making it pounce on Hishamaru in midair. This was a vary 'haphazard' magic, controlled without a hand seal or a mantra and seemingly about to collapse at any moment. But because it was haphazard, it was swift and could react nimbly. Unable to avoid it, Hishamaru instantly put up a barrier in midair. The flame engulfed both the fox spirit and the barrier, burning fiercely.

Assaulted by waves of heat, lag spread over Hishamaru's body. In the first place, her aura was in an unstable state. Though she felt concerned and anxious, she couldn't break through this Fire Realm magic.

"Water conquers fire, order!"

The several water-element charms that flew over weakened the power of the Fire Realm before the barrier was burned away. It was Harutora.

The magic stream of water was instantly boiled into steam. Hishamaru escaped the Fire Realm through the steam as it scattered everywhere, descending to a building that still hadn't collapsed.

Though she immediately prepared for another attack, it didn't come. Kagami panted as he stared at Harutora on the other side of the shrine road.

The spiritual power he had gained from releasing the seal was Kagami's original strength. But It was extremely unstable. Though it was very powerful, the instability of this power made it feel as if it could misfire.

His control of the power wasn't quite perfect - or rather, this aura had been quite strange since the beginning. Kagami currently bore a wound that practically destroyed his spiritual body. He wasn't in any state to fight in a battle of magic.

But,

...He's doing this much with that body...!?

Kagami was doing his best to use his spiritual power and fight in this magic battle with his spiritual body in a near-death state.

He was able to do this thanks to force of will.

But what they had to be most alert of was his obsession. His powerful obsession with victory - with defeating the enemy.

Kagami's obsession was his pillar of strength, supporting his aura and fighting spirit.

Kagami inhaled deeply, forcefully stabilizing the aura inside his body.

"What's wrong, fox!? Come at me!"

Forming a hand seal again, he unleashed Fire Realm magic targeting Hishamaru on the roof. Hishamaru jumped carefully to avoid the attack, moving to the shrine road while kicking off the outer walls of the burning buildings.

Next to her was the close-quarters fight between Kakugyouki and Shaver. Kakugyouki had already fought against Miiyachi, so he was quite tired. Harutora couldn't move because he was sealing Miyachi. Kurahashi continued commanding Hakuma and Kuroun as he surveyed the situation. In this situation, he would attack Harutora to save Miyachi whenever the opportunity arrived.

In other words, Hishamaru had to attack Kagami in order to break through the current situation. She and Kagami were both in conditions far from perfect. Kagami was in this battlefield thanks to his dedication to victory, the pillar supporting his will to fight.

But just like Kagami, Hishamaru had no plans to back down.

...For my master.

Hishamaru readied her body, her waist-length hair drifting in midair as if unaffected by gravity.

Aura filled her body, serenely covering her as she glared at Kagami. Her seductive beauty slipped away as her eyes became round. She looked like a wild fox that was about to attack.

Unintimidated, Kagami smiled and licked his lips in anticipation, hitting his palm with his fist. Noticing Hishamaru's determination, Harutora shouted "Hishamaru, stop!". But Hishamaru consciously drove her master's voice out of her mind.

It was already very clear that time was precious. Needless to say, Hishamaru herself also knew that she needed to deal with the enemy at any cost to her own body.

".....Come."

Kagami said. Hishamaru's body was dotted by seductively beautiful blue foxfire.

But Hishamaru, who was completely absorbed by the battle before her, didn't notice that the ears on her head moved.

Though there were two shikigami fighting nearby. Each and every one of the nearby buildings were all burning and emitting black

smoke. Harutora behind her was reciting the 'Eight-way Bamboo Cage Curse', and Miyachi's flame was still fiercely burning inside it.

But that sound reached Hishamaru's ears when she had even cast away her master's voice.

The sound of an engine and exhaust from a highway in the distance.

Then, she heard it.

"...Harutora-kun!"

When he heard that voice, an explosion of various emotions poured forth from Harutora's heart. Shock, happiness, yearning, love, all very powerful. They became a driving force that made Harutora waver.

But the strongest emotion that assaulted him was fear.

He had prepared to clean up the scene before 'she' arrived, and in the worst case, if he couldn't make it in time, he would immediately retreat. Just like in Ogikubo. He definitely couldn't meet her. But right now that was impossible. Kagami was already in a battle state, and Kakugyouki was in no condition to guard their rear. He was unable to do anything about 'her'.

Most importantly, the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual was being held nearby. The Tenchuu Chifu Ritual that was the highest among the Tenzan Fukun Rituals. The ritual was already affecting the spiritual nature of the surroundings. It was also slowly beginning to affect the nearby souls.

He recalled the summer day two years ago.

When that long night ended, the dawn on the academy building rooftop had been greeted by a silently-held evocation.

Since then, Harutora had wandered the ocean of magic in order to undo the knot he had encountered back then. In order to think of a way to resurrect that knot into its former state. In order to make that thread whole and unbroken.

But...

## Part 4

She saw him.

That moment, Natsume shouted Harutora's name.

How long had it been since the altar had appeared in the city? Hama rushed along the asphalt road. Natsume stood up in the passenger's seat, pointing and gazing at the scene in front of her.

She had no idea at all what the exact situation was, but Harutora and the others had attacked Kanda Shrine from the south, and people had come to stop him. Then, Hama had driven along the right side of Hongo Road, heading to a visible part of Yushima Seidou, a shingled rooftop deep within the trees.

And on that shingled rooftop, she saw a figure.

A black-clothed figure.

"First seal, release!"

Natsume released her seal and draconic aura wove around her body.

Then,

"Second seal, release!"

"Shikigami, arise! Order!"

"Hakuou! Kokfuu!"

Touji, who had released his second-phase seal and become a living spirit, jumped up from backseat onto the open roof. At the same time, Suzuka also got onto a flying shikigami in order to move into position and Kyouko summoned her Type-G2 Yaksha defensive shikigami to Hama's right and left.

"Eh!? Is that the thing Ohtomo-sensei used against Doman!?"

"The 'Fire Demon's the one being sealed! And where's that Bakatora--"

"The others are all on the shrine road! In that case, Natsume, you go to Harutora. Suzuka and I will go to the shrine road! Tenma and Kyouko, stay in the car!"

"That depends on the situation!"

"I agree with Tenma!"

"Then keep Hakuou and Kokfuu behind to defend! Hama, you be careful too, don't crash!"

They shouted loudly as they ran to their own battlefields. Their hearts beat as adrenaline filled their bodies. Now that they were here, they felt a high of tension and nervousness that made them feel like throwing up. But there was no time to pay attention to those things as Hama reached the front of the shrine road.

The screeching sound of brakes rose up.

Natsume and Touji jumped down from the car and Suzuka flew into the sky on a shikigami. Defensive shikigami Hakuou and Kokfuu guarded Hama on the left and right, readying their katana and spear.

They all glanced at each other momentarily.

Touji headed to the shrine road, surveying the battlefield as if he were at war. His gaze moved up and to the side. "Kagami!?" Touji's eyes widened. Kagami also noticed him and smiled.

"Oh, Touji! You're so slow, living spirit."

He shouted in disdain. Touji didn't say anything to the transfigured Kagami.

Suzuka also had no words to say from the sky. In front of her eyes was a magic battle in process, but what an incredible, high-level battle! She understood things to a certain extent from gazing down at the shrine road. The ingenious magic sealing off Miyachi, and the power of the demonic aura being given off by the one-armed oni. Even so, what stole her attention the most was still the

transformation of Kagami and Shaver. From a spiritual standpoint, he was a completely different person from before. "Could it be..." Suzuka unconsciously muttered to herself. "The seal..."

Kyouko also jumped out of the backseat when Hama came to a complete stop. The shrine road burning with flame before her shocked her into silence, and after Touji's words got her to notice Kagami and the person behind him, nervousness and fear caused her body to stiffen. The sokutai-wearing man commanded two lions that she recognized. "Otou-sama!" she cried. "Kyouko?" Kurahashi uttered with a grim expression.

Tenma didn't look at the battlefield, but at Natsume's back. Then, he looked at his cherished friend Harutora and smiled naturally. But after noticing the complex expression on Harutora's face, his smile slowly disappeared. "Harutora-kun?" His question was mixed with anxiety.

And as for Natsume--

Natsume stood on the shrine road, looking at the Hall of Worship of Yushima Seidou. From the roof of the Hall of Worship, Harutora looked down at the road and Natsume.

Finally.

Finally, she had met him.

She had originally had many other emotions, but the moment she met Harutora's eyes, only that simple thought remained in Natsume's heart.

Harutora wore the Raven's Coat and an eyepatch on his left eye.

He seemed a little bit taller, and his hair was longer than before.

He had changed, but he hadn't changed. It was still Harutora in front of her. The childhood friend she had always been searching for.

It was great.

She thought.

But Harutora was shouting something. She couldn't hear too clearly. He seemed to be trying desperately to tell her something, but for some reason it didn't enter her ears.

Then - she felt that gaze. A gaze pointed straight at her from behind her back.

Natsume slowly turned her head. Harutora was shouting something - as if trying to stop her - but it didn't stop Natsume from turning her head.

Then.....

The owner of that gaze was behind her back, turning her body as if to look back at her.

Several gazes momentarily crossed.

In the end.

Natsume's and Hishamaru's gazes slowly overlapped.

Right-- 'She' inexplicably thought--

Her soul began to resonate.



The first person to notice something strange was Tenma, who was looking at her and Harutora from outside the battlefield.

He watched in the direction of Kanda Shrine and saw the way Harutora shouted "No!" and tried to convey his point so desperately and Natsume turn around abnormally slowly.



And then, the way she froze motionlessly.

He had a bad premonition and felt uneasy, as if his insides had turned to ice.

Harutora suddenly sprinted down from the roof, shouting. It was already very clear that something had gone wrong.

Tenma burst open the driver's seat door.

But,

"Wait."

Kyouko's voice stopped him before he jumped out of Hama.

He turned around for a moment and was so astonished that he almost stopped breathing.

Kyouko stood in the backseat, staring at Kanda Shrine. But he recognized this unusual expression of hers. Kyouko was currently divining. A condition of Kyouko's divining was that she had to understand the aura of the subject. And right now, there were probably a few additional stars twinkling ominously.

Also, stars were connected to each other, as Suisen had said before. The connections between stars were complex and chaotic right now in this battlefield. The stars flashed brightly, radiating together with other stars to draw out constellations. Kyouko observed these constellations.

Then,

"Please, go stop....."

Saying that, Kyouko pointed up the shrine road towards Kanda Shrine.

Stop. But stop what? Tenma opened the door, watching Kyouko.

But Kyouko didn't say anything more than what she did. If she meant stop the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual, that didn't even need to be said. But

Kyouko had called out to Tenma in particular and asked him to stop something. While pointing to Kanda Shrine. In that case, what did she truly mean?

What exactly was Kyouko saying by stopping Tenma when he was planning to go join up with Natsume and Harutora?

Tenma ground his teeth. He couldn't make a decision, but he couldn't ignore it.

In that case,

"Suzuka-chan! I will leave Natsume-chan to you!"





Kurahashi noticed the abnormality happening to his daughter from far away. It was similar to what occasionally happened to Takiko, a magnificent change in aura accompanied by a rapt, blank expression. This was the same kind of abnormality that happened to his mother Kurahashi Miyo and Tsuchimikado Yasuzumi.

"Kyouko, you--"

There was no mistaking it, this was divination. His daughter was truly divining.

Kurahashi himself was surprised at the emotions that suddenly overflowed in him. An extremely rare - an extremely precious and hard-to-obtain ability had bloomed in his own daughter. As her figure was reflected in his eyes, joy, loneliness, and pride all whirled inside him at the same time, filling him with deep emotion. But he witnessed and was moved as if she were 'a youngster' rather than 'his own child'. Kurahashi had stopped feeling emotions that a father normally ought to feel since a long time ago.

He wasn't the least bit qualified to feel those emotions.

But the pride he felt at this time was doubtlessly genuine.

Kurahashi's bloodline had truly been passed down there. She was a new holder of the Kurahashi blood, unlike him and his father.

Keep practicing, he softly said in his heart.

Then, Kurahashi resolutely cut his feelings of attachment with an iron will and turned his gaze to Harutora.

Perhaps Harutora was a more powerful and outstanding Onmyouji than he was right now.

But Kurahashi also had something Harutora didn't. It wasn't a problem of who was more powerful or who was superior, it was just that they were acting in different positions. As Kurahashi turned his gaze back from his daughter, Harutora ran towards Natsume.

Kurahashi wouldn't let up this opportunity. He leaped out with adept movements.



Heat and wind raged above the battlefield alongside thunderous noise. Suzuka rode on her shikigami's back, flying as she tried to observe the situation below her. The transformed Kagami and his shikigami Shaver were in the center of the battlefield right now. They were with Kurahashi, probably. In that case, how should Suzuka and the others fight against them?

As she was desperately thinking, she suddenly heard someone calling her name.

It was Tenma's voice. Then, Natsume's name also reached her ears. The voice carried urgency, making Suzuka turn her head immediately.

Natsume was suddenly about to collapse where she stood on the road. This reaction made Suzuka think of the attack<sup>[18]</sup> that had happened yesterday. Some kind of problem had happened with the magic that kept Natsume alive. She felt her body become cold. If the magic cast on Natsume crumbled, it meant her immediate destruction. If her soul was released one more time, then there would be no way to get it back again.

Just then, a dark shadow flitted by and grabbed the collapsing Natsume in his arms.

"Bakatora!"

She sighed in relief, freed from a moment of extreme tension. Then, her heart warmed up, realizing from how he rushed over to Natsume that Harutora's attitude hadn't changed.

That warmth wasn't just pure joy. It was more complex and multifaceted, with a yearning that made her heartbeat speed up alongside painful worry. Emotions that she couldn't control. Right now wasn't the time to be driven around by these emotions. Right now, she already knew her naivety, selfishness, and mental immaturity. But she couldn't allow herself to stay that way. Suzuka wanted to grow along with her comrades and become strong together.

"...Ah!"

She noticed it due to trying to maintain an objective grasp of the entire battlefield. Actually, Suzuka was the only one who spotted it.

A small presence surreptitiously moving through the battlefield. A shikigami - a WA1 Swallow Whip. The blue swallow binding-type shikigami passed through the battlefield roiling with eddies of aura and demonic aura without making a sound. It glided over to a low altitude above the shrine road, heading straight for the place Natsume and Harutora were.

I can't let you succeed.

"Order!"

Almost unconsciously, Suzuka threw out a fire-element charm of her own creation. A fireball became an arrow of light that shot at the blue swallow making a beeline for Natsume. But the WA1 Swallow Whip changed its flight path before it hit. In front of Suzuka's surprised gaze, it flapped its wings and rose with the wind. It flew past Natsume and Harutora's heads, heading towards the Hall of Worship rooftop where Harutora had just been.

Over there was the rock that was still wrapped in bamboo leaves.

Ah! As Suzuka let out a gasp, the WA1 Swallow Whip flew into the roof, breaking the surrounding shingles together with the curse

implement.



Touji, Suzuka, and Natsume had all arrived. Finally, the players were present. Kagami joyfully smiled and showed his teeth. Spiritual power circulated through his body alongside his continuously-beating pulse. The unstable flow made Kagami even more excited. He felt as if he were forcefully reining in a wild bronco. More relevantly, considering this ever-changing battle and this intense battlefield, perhaps his current condition was only fitting.

But he couldn't understand Hishamaru.

At the first, he had suspected some kind of trap. He hadn't thought that Hishamaru would have flown over this way, only to suddenly freeze, turn, and fly back as if ignoring him. Kagami had noticed when Hama arrived as well, as his gaze had unconsciously moved to track the shikigami.

And now, Hishamaru had stopped looking at Kagami and was turned away, without reacting at all. As if she were completely unguarded. As he thought that, intense lag appeared all over the shikigami's body.

And this lag wasn't minor. The more Kagami watched, the more he wondered, his eyes narrowing. This lag was to the same extent as when she had released her seal - when the little girl shikigami had turned back into Hishamaru..... No, maybe it was even more powerful than back then. It 'looked' to him to be more severe.

Then,

"Damn!"

Kakugyouki noticed Hishamaru's abnormality and prepared to move to her. But Shaver wouldn't permit that. He bellowed angrily, feeling

as if he were being looked down at, and slashed at him. And the blade grazed him. Kakugyouki's movement lacked finesse. Naturally, Hishamaru's abnormality was the most important.

What to do.[\[19\]](#)

The moment Kagami wondered, a huge magical energy came from the shrine road, along with a violent heatwave as if to herald the end of the world.

Flame.

The flame that had been contained spread like hellfire pouring from the underground. The magic sealing Miyachi had been undone. Regaining its freedom, the flame left Miyachi's control and destroyed everything around it as if to vent its anger. Harutora put up a strong barrier for him and Natsume. Kyouko immediately strengthened Hama's barrier, and Suzuka above their heads also flew to a higher altitude to retreat. "Third seal, release!" Touji instantly released the final seal, crossing his arms and readying himself. The sea of flame spreading in all directions engulfed everything and poured over the shrine road.

Kurahashi put up a barrier behind him. Kagami also couldn't ignore this firepower. He made a hand seal and put up a barrier. Even at this time, Hishamaru still had no reaction.

How unfortunate. It was very clear that even Hishamaru would be easily eliminated if Miyachi's out-of-control flame swallowed her at this state.

But,

Kakugyouki's giant body slipped between the motionless Hishamaru and the approaching flame in the nick of time.

Then, the flame immediately buried the shrine road, covering Kagami and the others, even scorching the surface of Zuishin-mon.

The hastily-assembled barrier made a noise telling him that it would shatter soon. What insane firepower. But Miyachi seemed to have finally taken back control. The magical flame that had buried the



surroundings suddenly vanished, and the flame scattered.

What a fierce, dazzling battlefield.

But at that moment, it was the single-minded Shaver who was in control of any agitation or excitement.

Kakugyouki had used his body to protect Hishamaru, and Shaver needed only to pursue him. He finally had an opportunity. From behind Kakugyouki, under the cover of fire--

The blade of Hige-kiri pierced through his left side.

"Got you!"

Shaver squealed joyfully like a child.

Demonic aura poured from the wound along with a thick flow of blood. Lag appeared over his giant body and his valiant form wavered. This one was no graze.

It was almost a deadly wound. Though Hishamaru could be seen collapsing on the shrine road in front of Kakugyouki, now it was Kakugyouki's condition that was more severe. The oni turned unsteady on his feet, going down on one knee. He couldn't stop close his wound, and the demonic aura that leaked from him every time lag coursed through him began to dissipate.

Kagami smiled at the legendary oni's suffering figure.

But,

".....Not yet."

The defensive familiar put on the reckless, blood-chilling smile of a demon god.

A spiritual blade that countered oni had certainly pierced into Kakugyouki.

Even so, Kakugyouki couldn't back down here.

Higekiri's blade thrust further into Kakugyouki's body, accompanied by crackling, electricity-like lag.

Kakugyouki shortened the distance between him and the surprised Shaver.

Finally, after the blade was completely thrust into him, Kakugyouki twisted his body.

He unyieldingly bared his fangs while enduring the piercing pain of the blade in his body, throwing a fist into Shaver's face. Kagami broke out in goosebumps. The demonic aura that had filled that momentary impact was clearly an even higher output than Miyachi.

Shaver was knocked flying, crashing into a still-burning wall that collapsed along with the outside of the building. "Ugh!?" Kagami ground his teeth. Since his spiritual power was unstable, he had just given Shaver magical energy and let him do as he pleased with it. Getting careless and taking that blow from close range had put the shikigami into a state unsuited to fight. Never let up, and finish the enemy in a single blow. That strike had proved the might of the ancient power Kakugyouki.

But the cost was great.

The horns on Kakugyouki's forehead disappeared, and his body returned to its original size. He wasn't leaving his battle form, he was no longer able to maintain it. His face pale as he suffered through lag, and his messy hair stuck to his face. The shirt he wore had become a ruined rag, and the demonic aura that had flowed like a waterfall accumulated densely at his feet.

"Honestly."

Kakugyouki looked at Kagami and smiled proudly.

"If it isn't the brat who needs attention..... So? What's going on, kid? Are you up next?"

Kagami's body shivered with excitement.

".....Ha. Great. How fascinating, Kakugyouki.....!"

It had to be this way. Otherwise, it wouldn't be worth sacrificing myself to remove the seal.

Kagami refined his magical energy. He formed a hand seal, converting all of the spiritual power flowing forth into magical energy. His head swayed weakly, as if his blood was being sucked away. But he didn't care at all. Happiness. Joy. Kagami was filled with a rousing fighting spirit in front of the one-armed oni whose intense lag made him seem like a spectre.

He started off with a jab.

"On bishibishi karakara shibari sowaka!"

He didn't mess around with little tricks, he just threw out Unmoving Golden Chains head-on with all his power.

But before Kakugyouki took a stance, an oni ran into the shrine road and deflected Kagami's Golden Chains. Kagami's eyes widened.

A young samurai clad in flames of demonic aura.

An oni - no, a living spirit.

"Sorry Kagami, I'm switching in."

Touji breathed demonic aura from his fanged mouth and stared at Kagami with ferocious intent.



He had been immersed in the flame of the Fire Demon, with its legendary might.

But he had gotten through it.

Perhaps the altar set up for the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual was affecting him.

In the past, he had seen their enemy Kumomaru increase the power

of a spiritual disaster. Perhaps a similar effect was now happening to Touji's body. This intensely growing strength scared even him.

Ara-mitama, the dependents[20] of Taira no Masakado.

The oni's strength inhabiting Touji's body was ineffective against the Masakado dependents. But strength was ultimately strength. He still had ways to support his comrades.

Sweeping away the remnants of flame wreathing his body, Touji looked at the Fire Demon who had escaped his sealing away.

Miyachi still seemed short of breath. His hands were on his bent knees, and he panted while greedily sucking in air. That said, it was impressive that he had lived through the 'Eight-Way Bamboo Cage Curse' that had even made Doman get serious.

Anyways, the battle was changing one incident after another. Natsume's anomaly and Miyachi's return. Since it had come down to it, all he could do was support Harutora. He knew that it wasn't reasonable, but he had to attack Miyachi. At least before he recovered completely. But how? When his third seal was released, the oni's destructive impulses were extremely strong, and it was difficult for him to react calmly and objectively. So all he could do was leave it up to instinct and go after a single target without looking back.

But,

"Touji!"

Harutora called out.

When was it that Harutora had started calling him by his first name[21]? How nostalgic. But that cornered voice forced Touji to cast aside his sentimental feelings. He came to his senses and met Harutora's one-eyed gaze. Harutora looked straight over and spoke.

"Help Hishamaru! I'm counting on you--"

"!?"

His legs that were readied to sprint out, stopped.

Immediately afterwards, a huge sound came from behind him.

Kakugyouki had sent Shaver flying. But Kakugyouki had also suffered a great wound - a wound that made it difficult for him to even stay materialized. And behind Kakugyouki was the collapsed Hishamaru that he had been protecting. Along with the next enemy - Kagami. Harutora and Kakugyouki were both prepared to protect Hishamaru.

Though Hishamaru and Kakugyouki were shikigami that Harutora commanded, Touji had no interaction with them. In contrast, he ought to prioritize his cornered friends Natsume and Harutora.

But,

"...If you're counting on me, I guess I have no choice..."

He would just trust Harutora here. Touji hopped down to the ground, running over to the shrine road like a shot arrow. He appeared in front of Kakugyouki wreathed in flames of demonic aura.

Then, he used that momentum to block with one hand the Unmoving Golden Chains that Kagami had unleashed.

He faced the wide-eyed Kagami and said,

"Sorry Kagami, I'm switching in."

"Touji! You!!"

Kagami flew into a rage again.

Touji had fought Kagami for a long time in training battles. He ought to be reasonably familiar with how much power Kagami had, but the person who stood before him right now was almost a different person. He could surmise a guess as to the reason. His spiritual form was clearly odd. Perhaps the seal regulating his spiritual power had been undone.

"Are you dissatisfied? Kagami-sensei."

"Well, this is fine! I'll give you a final lesson!"

Kagami rapidly formed a seal. A basic seal. Fire Realm Magic.

But it was a feint.

"Down!"

First-class spirit language. Touji had suffered this during their training, but the magical energy was far stronger than back then. But this restraining power was blown away by Touji's bellow. The roar of a living spirit created demonic aura and disrupted the spirit language spell. Kagami's expression changed quickly. He also noticed that Touji was no longer the same as the Touji of the past.

"You!!!"

Saying that, Kagami jumped back, keeping his distance. In contrast, Touji pursued him. He wouldn't let Kagami escape. A long-distance magic battle was very unfavorable for him, so he had to make it a close-quarters fight. However, Kagami noticed that intent. He jumped and chanted, unleashing the Fire Realm magic he had just prepared.

Touji saw the flame approaching from the front. He wanted to break straight through, but he couldn't. Behind him was Kakugyouki and Hishamaru. If Touji didn't protect them, the two of them would be incinerated by the flame. So he took a defensive stance, like when he had been immersed in Miyachi's flame and made it through. But this time, the flame didn't stop coming.

Being hit all over by the flame's might was quite tough even for a living spirit whose strength had increased. He gritted his teeth. He desperately stopped the spiritual pressure from pushing him back.

"We're fine, go on."

A low voice came from behind him. He looked back, meeting the gaze of Kakugyouki who was retreating with Hishamaru on his shoulder. Kakugyouki was still so calm even after taking such a wound. Touji laughed at himself. What reliable shikigami for such a flighty master.

Touji shoved aside the brunt of the Fire Realm magic that he had been enduring, approaching Kagami as if drilling through the flame.

But by then, Kagami's next attack was already coming. His fingertip slashed through the air time after time. A grid of kuji-kiri. The living spirit's momentum stopped as he was assaulted by a powerful attack. Next, Kagami threw out a wood-element and fire-element charm. They instantly reinforced each other - wood births fire, fire births earth - to reinforce an earth-element charm. A powerful weight burdened his shoulders. Touji barely managed to maintain his stance, almost falling over unsteadily.

But Kagami's continuous attack weren't over. Next were five charms. The five charms he threw out along with his magical energy arranged themselves into a pentagram pattern above Touji's head.

Then, Kagami chanted an incantation.

"God of the east sea, Amei. God of the west sea, Shukuryou. God of the south sea, Kyojou. God of the north sea, Gukyou. Gods of the four seas, fend off a hundred demons and drive back the fierce disaster. Order!"

The spiritual-disaster-repelling barrier of Imperial Onmyoudou. Touji knew it was bad news, but the earth-element charm was restricting his movement. He tried to push it off, but Kagami's magic was too fast. This was supposed to be a magic barrier to keep away spiritual disasters. But Kagami made it press down on Touji the living spirit from above. This he could no longer bear. Touji's knees buckled and he went down on a hand and a knee.

"Rgh!"

The barrier solidified the air. But the power of a spiritual disaster couldn't combat this spell. And Touji's strength stemmed from a mobile spiritual disaster. He was completely disabled.

"Hah! What's wrong, Touji. You're gonna end up lying on the ground again?"

As expected, he was very strong.

His spiritual power was clearly unstable, but Kagami was one of the strongest. The same went for his tactics. They seemed haphazard, but

they were actually calculated. As expected of a Divine General. Truly a high-level opponent. But Touji wouldn't be kicked away so easily...

"...!?"

A single instant. A blinding aura flowed into his body.

His strength hurtled upwards. Touji used that instant and instinctively unleashed the powerful strength into the ground that supported him.

Demonic aura crushed the asphalt road and roiled into the ground, forming underground pockets. Then, he escaped to the side, away from the magical barrier enveloping him. He threw his body out, tumbling over the ruined road and escaping from Kagami's magic. His wounds had already recovered before he noticed it. His body became light. Strength poured forth again.

The reason for this sudden change was nearby. Kagami and Touji both noticed the same thing.

They noticed that Touji wasn't the reason. They turned to look at Kanda Shrine.

"It's starting again.....!"

The spirit flow that connected the heavens to the earth was radiating and pulsing. The interrupted Tenchuu Chifu Ritual was beginning again. "Tch." Time was short. Touji clicked his tongue, then headed immediately for Zuishin-mon.

Then - he noticed that Kurahashi's figure had vanished.



The work Yashamaru had done could be classified into three parts.



Preparing an undoing magic to the the malicious magic that had infiltrated the altar, putting that magic into the altar, and circulating it to purify the altar.

Though Yashamaru couldn't leave his work, he was still free to 'watch' what happened outside from within. Harutora had set a trap to seal Miyachi in a barrier. The biggest hindrance to the altar purification was his appropriation of the magic comprising the altar.

But.....

Finally, that obstruction had been cleared away. Because Kurahashi had freed Miyachi.

"In that case...!"

Yashamaru hastened the circulation of the magical energy lines and spiritual power, swiftly cleansing the altar.

Time seemed to still around Takiko as a faint layer of light appeared again. It seemed almost as if the spirit flow connecting the heavens to the earth was cut, but a strong light began to shine again. Yashamaru started to flow his own power in as well. Connecting to the divine domain himself made his body shiver.

The paused Tenchuu Chifu Ritual had finally started back up again.

The spirit flow to the stone platform sped up and became more divine. Takiko, in her black miko clothing, gave off a warm white light that made it hard to look straight at her.

Then, the sleeves of that miko gently floated into the air as if being blown by a warm wind.

Takiko's light-covered body gently floated upwards. She moved up into the center, her fingertips losing contact with the stone platform. The events of Ogikubo transpired again. But this time, they weren't stopped halfway through. It went on until the end. Stunned, Yashamaru could do nothing but watch the scene before him.

Because of that, he couldn't immediately understand exactly what was happening to his body.

Before he realized it, Yashamaru was thrown from the front of the stone platform out to the side. His vision spun and shook up and down. "Wha--" He let out a voice that he usually didn't make. It - it had been so sudden that he hadn't noticed.

His body reacted before his mind as he turned in midair and landed on the edge of the territory. "Eh!?" A small wail leaked out from nearby. It was the 'Full Moon' girl whose existence he had nearly forgotten about. But Yashamaru's gaze was only watching the place he had just been.

On the side of the stone platform appeared two oni.

A thick, large-headed man whose proportions didn't at all match and a large woman who was practically half-nude. It seemed to have been the large woman who had sent him flying, as she seemed to be proudly clapping her hands. The ox-head and horse-face oni.

Ancient shikigami that served Doman.

And also,

"Ha." An aged voice.

The roof of the Hall of Worship. On the edge shingled roof, dangling his legs, was a boy who seemed to be an elementary schooler no matter how he looked. He wore an old black suit and a bowtie, and the sunglasses that stared at him were red as blood.

"...Priest Doman."

He said in a daze.

"That's right."

Doman replied with a smile.

"I see, this is your area of expertise. If I say so myself..... this is quite an unfortunate meeting. Sir, might I get you to reconsider?"

Now, Yashamaru finally began to recognize the desperate situation.

He had been too focused on Harutora and the others..... and had rushed to purify the altar. At some point, he had forgotten the existence of an interloper.

A dry voice sounded within the territory. Quiet footsteps resounded in Yashamaru's ears like thunder.

Releasing his stealth magic, 'Shadow' already stood in front of the stone platform. Right in front of Takiko whose sleeves were spread like wings. He ignored his shikigami's taunting, and didn't spare a glance for the hindrance Yashamaru now that he had been pushed aside. He was an industry professional. He knew that nonsense and taunts could cause the smallest of openings. No matter how much he believed that it was his victory, no matter what grudges he held, completing his job was first and foremost.

There wasn't even any tension on his face.

With his face emotionless and cold, his coat rustled to expose an arm.

Takiko was covered in a spirit flow descending from the sky that protected her spiritually and magically. It was a firm defense, and even the Fire Demon's flame couldn't easily destroy it.

So 'Shadow' held a black piece of metal in his hand.

Forty-five caliber. An old-model Colt Government.

Yashamaru's eyes widened.

With as much significance as one might attribute to flicking the ash from a cigarette, 'Shadow' emotionlessly moved his finger to the trigger.

## Part 5

After the ritual was interrupted, Akino had been tied up and dropped in the corner of the territory's barrier. The thin veil of darkness covering Zuishin-mon obstructed vision from outside the territory. So Akino had no way of knowing what kind of battle was unfolding outside.

But she understood that it was Harutora or Natsume and the others who were fighting right now. Everyone was desperately trying to stop the ritual being carried out in front of her.

And it wasn't just Harutora and Natsume who wanted to stop the ritual.

The familiar white-haired man who suddenly appeared was the old teacher of Natsume and the others. Ohtomo Jin.

The man who had once visited Akino and the others in the warehouse that had been their hiding place.

But the Ohtomo Jin who appeared inside the territory was a completely different person from back then. There wasn't a shred of the down-to-earth attitude and easy familiarity he had showed in front of Natsume and the others in the warehouse. He gave off a dry, cold, and terrifying impression. His atmosphere was ruthless, merciless, and almost inhuman.

Gozu and Mezu stood next to each other, staring rudely at Yashamaru.

Ashiya Doman looked down seemingly joyfully from the roof of the Hall of Worship.

With the three shikigami awaiting his command, Ohtomo drew a pistol on Takiko in front of the altar. Ohtomo's attitude was very calm. Unable to understand the situation in front of her and swallowed up by the ominous atmosphere, Akino shrank back.

An astounding shriek rose up.

It was Yashamaru. The Yase Doji defensive familiar summoned up an unusual power and broke off to protect his cornered master. His boldness took Gozu and Mezu by surprise. But Doman was unaffected.

"Sorry."

With that word, he snapped, and for some reason, Yashamaru stopped, moving as if to fend something off. Akino quickly realized the reason. It was an illusion. She had seen a similar scene at Seishuku Temple.

But she had never heard of an illusion that affected shikigami.

On the other hand, Ohtomo barely paid attention to the conversation that happened next to him. It felt like he was doing a boring job on a boring street. But there was a barely perceptible, tiny sense of fatigue. The fatigue was from the many things burdening him down, but he calmly continued forward while bearing that fatigue.

Ohtomo calmly put his finger on the trigger--

But.

"Ohtomo-sensei!"

The moment that voice rang out, Ohtomo's actions froze.

Surprisingly, it was Tenma who came through Zuishin-mon with his presence hidden. Tenma looked straight at Ohtomo. He shouted, seeming to be full of clarity after understanding something.

"I finally get it. Kyouko was talking about you, Ohtomo-sensei. That's why I'm here. Please stop, Ohtomo-sensei! You have to!"

Tenma shouted desperately. Something made Tenma slow down. Ohtomo's face was the same as always, with no expression at all. But he gave off a different impression from before.

A moment of stillness immediately followed.

Then something happened right afterwards. Akino could only watch things happen in shock.

Tenma was sent flying from behind and cried out in surprise. Ohtomo reflexively looked towards Tenma.

Two large lions flew over. A white lion and a black lion. Gozu and Mezu reacted immediately, blocking the lions as they leaped.

Ohtomo noticed something and hastily pointed his gun back at Takiko. Kurahashi, releasing his stealth, grabbed the gun.

Ohtomo stared and let go of the cane in his hand. And like that, the two of them began righting. Doman could do nothing to the two as they tussled, so he stood on the roof and stretched as he watched their battle.

It was an incantation-less, seal-less, close-quarters battle of magic of the highest level. They used the fastest, simplest magics. Magical energy shot out like high-speed sword strikes clashing together.

"Kurahashi!"

Yashamaru, who still couldn't use magic, called out.

Akino never would have thought that Yashamaru would use such a grieving voice.

"I'm counting on you!"

After that, with a bang, a dry gunshot resounded inside the territory.

After the pistol fired, it was knocked from Ohtomo and Kurahashi's tussling hands onto the stone platform with a clatter. Ohtomo picked the gun up without regard for his own safety. He tumbled across the stone platform and pointed the gun at Takiko the moment he stood back up.

Kurahashi blocked his aiming path.

The front of Kurahashi's robe was stained red. Seeing the slowly-spreading crimson, Kurahashi spread his arms to protect Takiko.

Blood dripped from the corner of his mouth.

He groaned.

".....You....."





Ohtomo cocked the trigger.

Bang - the bullet didn't hit. It was blocked by a barrier of light and vanished.

"What..."

Ohtomo was taken aback.

The stone platform was surrounded by light.

The spirit flow connecting the heavens to the earth had vanished. Instead, a light descended from the sky, moving to the stone platform.

It was a radiant, divine light that felt as if it had mass. A light that didn't exist in this world. A light formed from aura that could only be 'seen' with spirit sight.

Seeing the light that surrounded his body, Kurahashi quietly let out an ".....Ohhh.....", and turned around, swaying and clutching his wound.

"You have done well."

Takiko smiled.

But was she truly Takiko? Akino wasn't sure anymore.

The pain and tension on Kurahashi's face vanished. He closed his eyes, seeming very satisfied, and fell to his knees and collapsed on the stone platform.

Takiko silently looked at the fallen Kurahashi, still smiling. Like a god forgiving a sinner.

Then, Takiko looked up to the sky and laughed to herself.

"What an excellent night for a banquet."

What happened that night were recorded in the history of magic for a long time.



# **Chapter 5 - Advent, Transcendant**

# Part 1

The spirit flow connecting the heavens to the earth that extended from within the territory in Kanda Shrine vanished.

The spell composing the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual's altar was undone and the magical energy vanished. Harutora bit his lip as his face paled. He looked to the side as he carried Natsume.

The sun had completely set and the colors of the night already tinted the sky. But fire still burned on the shrine road that had become a magic battlefield. The wisps of flame drifted to the end of the ruined road.

Kanda Shrine's Zuishin-mon was illuminated from the inside. The distinct darkness that had covered the gate was no more. Though a magnificent light came from the other side of the gate, it was accompanied by a powerful spiritual power.

Sometimes, particles of light would rise upwards like snowflakes floating in the wind.

The terror had already become a divine realm - a secret world that that 'entity' in the center could clearly sense even from far away. More accurately, it wasn't that this 'entity' was in the center of the secret world, it was that the secret world was currently spreading out from the 'entity'.

A mysterious entity like the time the Taizan Fukun Ritual had been performed, one that existed in all places near and far. A similar entity was now slowly revealing itself inside the territory.

Both the people currently fighting and the people wounded on the ground gazed in the direction of Zuishin-mon. The spiritual might given off by that 'entity' couldn't be ignored, even from far away.

The might of a god.

"Damn....."

If the god's aura weren't stopped inside the territory, it would instantly change the spiritual nature of the surroundings.

...As he had thought.....!

The countless spirit flows that had been harnessed into the territory began to pulse ominously. Harutora knew very well the meaning of this activity.

He clutched his fatigued arm with a strength he didn't even know he had.

.....What.....

The girl before him was housing a god.

There was no other pretense. It was as if the truth had been drilled straight into his head. The godly might around his body terrified Ohtomo's soul. This might be a feeling even more primitive than instinct.

Ohtomo stayed turned around on the pedestal, holding the gun pointed towards Takiko. There were still bullets in the magazine, and Kurahashi had already fallen. At this distance, he definitely wouldn't miss.

But he couldn't shoot.

The finger pressing the trigger wouldn't move at all. Of course, it wasn't magic. Could his finger not move for a more profound reason?

Then--

Takiko faced Ohtomo.

A girl with red hair, wearing a black miko outfit. Her outline seemed to be shining right now. Aura gave off light that floated around the girl. Her red hair immersed in the light of aura resembled a burning flame, and the eyes that stared at Ohtomo resembled gems of a god.

"Ohtomo Jin."

Takiko said.

Goosebumps formed all over Ohtomo's body.

"Are you hoping for my destruction? Or the safety of your students?"

Ohtomo couldn't say anything at all.

Instantly, the aura erupting from the territory increased, whipping into a storm of magical energy.

"Ugh!?"

He hit a wall of the altar and collapsed onto the ground.

"Shit!" Gozu fell to his knees, looking up with gritted teeth, and Mezu followed.

Lag spread over their bodies. This was due to the gale from before - actually, the gale had been an attack aimed at the two of them, and Ohtomo had just gotten caught up in it.

Panting, the oni stared at Yashamaru, who had gotten free of the illusion.

The young man, with his slender, aristocratic body, seemed to completely recovered. Just like how a master gave his shikigami magical energy, Takiko was pouring strength into Yashamaru. Now, the defensive familiar had obtained her strength and the divine aura from her body, like a dependent[22].

Gozu was blocking the way. Yashamaru sent him flying with a blow, and walked straight up to the stone platform, in front of his master. He went down on one knee and lowered his head.

"Princess."

He said reverently, raising his head and staying kneeled. A blissful expression filled his face, as if his violence from just now had been a lie.

"Princess Masakado, how do you feel?"

Takiko smiled at the defensive familiar's question.

"Still nothing."

"Nothing? What do you mean?"

"I haven't come to this world in very long. My human feelings still haven't returned, and who knows if they still can return... In other words, my feelings have become the feelings collected after his death."

"Indeed....."

Yashamaru replied happily. But this was an abnormal joy, seeming imbalanced and unstable.

But--

In any case, that was no longer a problem. What was normal and what was crazy? Those fundamentals were already transforming here. This was no longer anything humans knew of. It was already a question of the 'world'.

Because gods were beings in between humans and the world. People knew of the world through gods, and changed the world through prayer to the gods. Natural grace was followed by the formation of deep concepts, trust in the gods, and communication with the gods. That was what happened in the ancient era as well as the recent past. Now, humans prayed to the gods and changed the 'world knowledge' that they possessed. That was what people called 'magic'.

Right now, a god had descended to the world.

It was natural that the world would change.

...Damn!

Moving produced intense pain. His ribs were broken or fractured. Also, the magical damage was extremely great. It had been a single strike, and he had just been collateral damage, but it was a surprise blow that he hadn't been guarded against.

...Right. What about Tenma-kun!? And that rabbit!

He hastily confirmed. Tenma was frozen standing, looking at the god's descent. But he wasn't hurt. He hadn't been blown by the gale just now. On the other side, the rabbit girl who had been with Natsume and the others was still lying in the same place on the ground. But the barrier closing her in was shattered. It looked like the barrier had acted as a shield to block the gale. She, like Tenma, was frozen. Only the rabbit ears on her head swayed left and right as if stimulated.

He thought of what Tenma had just said. He had come to stop Ohtomo in order to prevent the outcome Kyouko had divined. And although Ohtomo had been stopped, was this outcome good or bad?

"The spirit flow looks disturbed, but Princess Masakado doesn't seem angry."

"This place is slowly becoming suited for Princess Masakado. But... it's not enough. I'm not sure what to do."

"It doesn't matter. Tokyo is Princess Masakado's realm. Anything can be done for the Princess."

Yashamaru proclaimed calmly. Takiko didn't seem opposed to her defensive shikigami's statement. Perhaps her mind was slowly changing. Just like her spiritual body, which felt like something completely different after the ritual.

"In any case, there's nothing to worry about, Princess. Rather, you must be tired. You can't ignore the burden on your body. Why don't you rest for now."

Yashamaru spoke extremely respectfully, lowering his head again.

The Souma desire of many years had been realized. But no one needed to know that to realize that this wasn't normal. The situation was no longer normal. But the situation would definitely get worse with time.

But Takiko shook her head at her defensive familiar's words.



"I'm fine. Instead, I wish for you to do something for me."

Yashamaru raised his head.

"Bring Harutora here."

Takiko said. Ohtomo was taken aback.

Yashamaru didn't ask for the reason. He smiled brightly and replied "As you will". Ohtomo clicked his tongue.

...The safety of his students...

It was very clear what he must do now. Ohtomo put a healing charm on himself, removing the wounds from the magic while standing up.

"Gozu! Mezu! Are you alright?"

"Hey hey, you must be joking."

"Y-You can't order me around!"

The two lions had dematerialized the moment Kurahashi had died. The only enemies were Takiko and her shikigami. But Gozu and Mezu were clearly frightened by the opponent's presence. But that was obvious, since the opponent was so frightening.

Now that it was down to this, he could only rely on--

"What fun, what fun. To think I could see something so curious."

Doman appeared in front of Ohtomo. He had come down from the Hall of Worship rooftop at some point. He stared carefully at the miko standing on the stone platform as he said,

"I see. Although I've seen a god descend to possess someone before, this is the first time I've seen a god appear in a body. Though I imagined it, this is quite troublesome. Well, 'gods' don't care about others. Ah, what fun. This is truly a sight."

Doman cackled happily, unusually excited, as he spoke.

Speaking of which, Doman was an ara-mitama. But at this kind of

unusual time it was a blessing that he was reliable.

"Priest, help me stop them!"

"Hehe, you say to stop them, but that guys's just something that 'exists'."

"Don't make excuses, we need to stop them here no matter what!"

Takiko had asked whether his desire was her destruction or the safety of his students. But his students couldn't possibly be safe if Takiko was left to her own devices.

But,

"You seem to have misunderstood something, Ohtomo-kun."

Yashamaru said to Ohtomo. Ohtomo readied himself.

"We'll won't do anything to Harutora-kun anymore. At least as long as you don't present any threat to the Princess's life. The world's already changing. She and I will be gods. If you want your students to remain safe, shouldn't you ask for our protection? It would be safest to do nothing."

"....."

Ohtomo gritted his teeth.

What kind of nonsense - he couldn't say it. Importuning a god to avoid disaster. It was an extremely natural thing to do. That's what kind of things 'gods' were. Just like he said, they were already those kinds of entities.

He felt like his brain was warping.

"Sensei!"

Tenma called out. He looked back in concern. On the rooftop bordering the Hall of Worship stood a young man bathed in the light filling the territory.

Ugh. Ohtomo moaned even more painfully. It was Kumomaru. Kumomaru, who had gone to the Armored Juggernaut, had returned with his master's permission.

"...Princess!"

Kumomaru looked down towards the stone platform as his body shuddered in joy.

"Although... I'm late... I finally... bid you welcome..."

He went down on one knee, as if unable to endure it.

Ignoring the defensive familiar's feelings, Ohtomo began to sweat.

He didn't even know what Takiko alone could do, and also there were the two Yase Doji.

"What should we do, my master?"

Doman leaned and looked back.

"It might not be bad just to listen to their proposal."

"What!? Priest!?"

"I'd be quite excited if they faced us as Onmyouji, but with them as opponents it would just be tiring and boring. Also, joining them would allow us to further approach the depths of 'magic'. And we'd even be able to figure out what comes before 'magic'."

Saying that, Doman cackled.

Suddenly, a scene sprang up in Ohtomo's mind - the scene of him confronting Doman at the academy.

Back then, Ohtomo had surmised his true form, and Doman had invited him to come to his side. Something about diving into the depths of 'magic' together.

"What they're doing is something like worshipping god. Challenging the limits of 'magic'. I feel quite good about it. If my master's desires

can be realized, then what's not to like?"

Doman spoke happily. That voice had the same kind of madness as Yashamaru's from before. But that was that. Doman's joy when he used magic was like Yashamaru's, the joy of an eccentric. That was how he was.

And now that the world had changed from normal to abnormal, it might no longer be right to term their abnormalities as such. Perhaps their ways became normal, like common sense.

His head felt dazed. He wanted to make calm judgments, but his basis for decision-making and his values had already started changing.

What can I do for the students? What was correct?

Have my decisions been correct from the beginning? The students had encountered danger - and he had let them leave the battlefield. But the students who had originally been kept aside had fought with their own power and run into quite a few crises. THEN, they and Ohtomo had gotten involved in various escapades and arrived here and now.

His feet creaked like they were going to crumble away. He felt as if he were losing his balance. The feeling he'd gotten recently that his aura was becoming chaotic definitely wasn't his imagination. It was the truth. Ohtomo's aura was slowly becoming affected by being inside the territory. It was already starting to change.

What should he do? Ohtomo's thoughts became lost in a maze.

Then,

"For now, run away."

A warm, refined voice. A voice praising the moon on an excellent spring night[23].

It wasn't loud at all, but the voice reached everyone inside the territory. It was because that voice didn't belong to anyone present.

That voice didn't sound like it had any fear of the god who was here or her dependents. That said, it couldn't be called uncivil either.

It was extremely 'natural'. It was already used to entities like gods.

It was Akino.

But Akino was still lying on the ground, the eyes beneath her glasses wide with surprise, and her hands covering her mouth.

She herself was more surprised than anyone who cast their gaze at her.

Also, Akino kept her surprised expression, moved the hands covering her mouth away, and said again,

"Doman. I seem to recall that you still have that favor from our competition of magic. I'd like you to return that now."

She spoke again. This time, the polite voice was filled with teasing.

But it wasn't Akino's voice.

Then,

"Oh, hehehe."

Doman suddenly laughed out loud. In his small child's body, he covered his stomach and stamped a foot, bending over with laughter.

He laughed so hard that he couldn't speak.

"My, my. I've been dead for a thousand years, and now you want that? While you've joined the ranks of the Yaoyorozu no Kami[\[24\]](#) - how greedy can one be? Truly, even I feel like I chose to challenge a troublemaker."

What in the world was this? Doman continued laughing, leaving the confused Ohtomo out of the loop. Yashamaru gave Akino a sharp glance as if noticing something.

Takiko looked up at the sky,

"Taizan Fukun, huh."

She smiled meaninglessly.

Doman was still laughing.

"Master, I don't have enough power on my own. I'll take your spiritual power too, Master."

"Wait, Priest."

"I'm borrowing Gozu and Mezu too. Things have finally become interesting, so I'll keep you alive. Alright."

"Priest!"

As Doman refined magical energy, Ohtomo's body lost its energy bit by bit. Doman was sucking his spiritual power. Since he didn't even have his cane, Ohtomo collapsed as if the blood had left his body.

...What happened just now, and what was Doman doing!?

As Ohtomo became more and more depleted, Doman's magical energy went up by leaps and bounds. "What a meaningless thing you're making me do." As he complained, his spiritual presence swelled up to a powerful level of an ara-mitama.

Ara-mitama, a form of god. As the oni cheered, the Yase Dojis' faces became grim. The two gods confronted each other inside the territory of Kanda Shrine.

"Ashiya Doman."

Takiko said.

"I want to speak with 'him', don't interfere."

"I don't recommend you do that."

Doman replied.

"He's someone that would even willingly use gods or demons. His mark is the bellflower, isn't it? Or are you incensed that you were

betrayed, and this time you want to get back at Seimei?"

Doman chuckled, his small body full of magical energy bordering on the divine.

"Doman!" Yashamaru shouted angrily, but Doman didn't mind at all. He sucked in Ohtomo's aura without any care in the world, refining a frightening amount of magical energy very quickly. Then, Doman's body - the body of the youngster that Doman was possessing - collapsed.

The ara-mitama named Ashiya Doman had abandoned the body he possessed.

But Doman said one final thing with the fallen body.

"We'll meet again, Ohtomo Jin."

Then, even more of Ohtomo's aura was sucked away, and he slowly lost consciousness.

## Part 2

She had the same feeling when the 'Full Moon' intervened she had entrusted herself to Harutora.

Akino also knew the entity that spoke with her mouth. When Harutora had spoken over a long distance through the Full Moon, 'he' had chatted about Natsume using magic.

But the speaking without any prior preparation had scared her to death. It might actually be possible for someone to be 'scared to death'. Especially for her. She wanted a break from this.

'I'm not done.'

It suddenly spoke, and she jumped in surprise again.

'I'm in quite a hurry too. But please forgive me for giving you trouble before.'

It was calmly speaking like before. But where did the voice come from? From inside her.

Speaking of which, when she had spoken with Harutora, 'his' voice sounded like it had come out from inside her.

Just then, a shocking clash of magical energy happened inside the territory.

It seemed like a spectacular battle of magic was beginning. She peeked out, seeing the figures of Takiko on the altar with her aureola of light, and a giant, unknown demon lord standing in front of her. Though Akino hastily lay back down on the ground, the ground was also trembling. Flame swirled, gales blew, electricity raced, and explosions roared.

Akino covered her face-down head with both hands, curling into a ball. The two rabbit ears that showed from the gaps between her hands were stiff.



'Inside of all that is one of the Twelve Gods, of which 'I' and Taizan Fukun also belong to. His presence is extremely thick this close up. That's why I'm able to speak like this. Of course, this is only temporary, as you've already forgotten how to continuously operate.'

'He' spoke in a teasing tone.

But she couldn't understand ninety percent of what he said. In any case, now wasn't the time to talk about such things. He was so calm even in this situation.

"U-Um, r-right now i-isn't the time to talk about those things, right!?"

Though Akino was curled up with her hands on her head, magics were being unleashed very close to her, magics that felt incredibly powerful. She might get caught up in them and killed at any moment. From the way 'he' spoke just now, maybe 'he' was an extremely powerful superman, but Akino wasn't. Not one bit. She was a minor character who had no relationship to this place - this place where gods existed.

But,

'It's alright.'

'He' warmly reassured the frightened Akino.

'Get up and go help, brave child.'

"Eh?"

Akino inadvertently raised her head.

She was in the corner of the territory.

Seeing that,

"Hey! Rabbit ears!"

A paper crane shikigami from the night sky passed through the magic flying back and forth, descending in a glide.

It was Suzuka.

"!!"

Suzuka looked straight at her, completely ignoring the danger close by. The moment she saw that gaze, something warm took shape in Akino's heart.

It was courage.

Akino stopped shuddering and got up. Suzuka's shikigami hurtled over. Akino rushed out.

She ran swiftly and jumped. Then, she flew to the sky - and at her apex, Suzuka's shikigami caught Akino in midair.

She rose up rapidly.

As her vision blurred and swerved and her sense of balance was thrown into disarray, Akino clutched desperately onto Suzuka's extended arm. Magic from inside the territory constantly burst upwards as if to shoot down the rapidly rising shikigami.

When they managed to escape--

The acceleration suddenly stopped and her body began flying lightly.

Akino opened the eyes that she had shut at some point. Next to her was the sky. Just like when she had jumped into the air carrying Natsume before, but back then she hadn't had the opportunity to look around like this.

She could see the moon. She could see the horizon. Looking far outwards, she could see the tall buildings in the distance and the nighttime scenery spread out before her.

Also, she could 'see' the aura beginning to move. She unconsciously doubted her own eyes. The spirit flow that normally flowed underground couldn't be 'seen' without focused concentration. But now, she could see an ominously roiling spirit flow overlapping with the streets.

It was quite vast in quantity.

"What is that....."

She unconsciously grabbed Suzuka's hand. Though she didn't know what had happened, this was an extraordinarily ominous scene.

"Rabbit ears! Are you hurt!?"

Suzuka called out.

Without a doubt, she was 'rabbit ears'. She hastily turned her head. Suzuka's face was right there. Akino replied to that cute, pretty face.

"N-No!"

She replied loudly, and an instant afterwards, she thought of those two.

"Tenma-kun! And that person called Ohtomo!"

"They're alright!"

"Eh."

As she heard that, she hastily looked down. But the territory was covered in black wind, flame, and smoke whipped up by the magic battle, so she had no idea what was happening down there. The only thing she managed to 'see' from the aura inside the territory was the same as what Akino had peeked at before, the figure of the demon lord and Takiko battling.

Just like 'he' had asked, he was returning a favor. Alone.

Then,

'There's nothing to worry about. That guy mostly doing what he wants.'

She heard 'his' voice. The voice seemed to be mixed with exasperation and intimacy[25] this time - perhaps they were close acquaintances. But what she was more interested in was that the

voice seemed far away and very faint.

Instinctively, she faintly understood the reason. It was probably because they were slowly moving away from the territory. She seemed to recall 'him' saying something like the area being very thick. It was probably because they left that the effects had thinned.

But 'he' seemed unconcerned. 'You guys run away with the others.'

The moment after he said that, she saw two oni fly out of Zuishinmon. They were Doman's shikigami. The fat oni was carrying the unconscious Ohtomo on his back, and the woman oni held the confused Tenma.

Then, the fat oni sucked in a breath.

"You guys, run!"

His voice rang through the sky. It was extremely loud.

Then,

"Tch! It's started!"

Suzuka clicked her tongue. Then, before Akino could ask about it, it happened. Around the territory, yin aura solidified and became miasma. Then, reaching its limits, the miasma became spiritual disasters. And this happened everywhere.

"We need to go! I can't help you if you fall down!"

They descended rapidly as Suzuka said that. Akino heard herself scream. The world blurred. But for some reason, she didn't feel scared at all.

Yeah.

She seemed to feel 'him' nodding in great satisfaction.

'Well then, let's meet again the next time the stars come around.....  
Ahh, but don't forget what I told you.'

'You can make it if you hurry.'

Saying that, 'his' presence flew into the distance. Akino was unable to properly reply as she held on to Suzuka for dear life.

So in the end, she mentally asked what she had always been very curious about.

Who are you?

Then, 'he', slightly surprised at what Akino said, smiled and replied to Akino as teasingly as when he had spoken to Doman.

'God.'

Then--

Akino descended to the battlefield again.



The spiritual nature of the surroundings was changing rapidly. The activity of the spirit flow - the normally dormant spirit flow - was beginning to become agitated.

Harutora held Natsume in his arms.

Ultimately, he had used the magic he had cast on Natsume one more time - the magic that connected her soul and body using Hokuto. But Natsume still hadn't awoken. The situation was moving to the next stage. He couldn't stabilize her aura with the same methods as the past. Also, Natsume's current state probably couldn't handle the spiritual influence of Masakado's descent.

Hishamaru's current condition was also terrible. She was a spiritual entity right now - in other words, she was just a soul. She couldn't handle a huge spiritual influence in a state without a physical body. Maybe if she had stayed in the Tsuchimikado-sealed state - in the form of Kon - but now that was spilt milk.

No, if she changed forms right now it might end her life.

Also, that legendary Kakugyouki had also suffered extremely severe wounds in order to protect Hishamaru.

The great oni who had lived for a thousand years had sacrificed himself to protect Hishamaru, but Harutora hadn't been able to do anything.

He carried Natsume, keeping alert as to the unstable spirit flow - but he had no idea what he ought to do after this or where he ought to go. He was caught in a dilemma.

...Damn!

Harutora raged as he cursed his uselessness. His body shivered as he dreaded losing Natsume.

But something strange happened as Harutora felt helpless. Inside the territory, the divine, unearthly aura rapidly swelled up.

It swelled and swelled, then exploded, scattering a tremendous aura.

Many incomparably powerful magics exploded one after another over at Zuishin-mon. Each and every magic contained spiritual power rivalling Miyachi's Fire Realm.

And he had seen that magical energy before. Could it be? Harutora was dumbstruck.

"Hey, what the hell!?"

Standing on the shrine road, Kagami looked at Kanda Shrine and yelled. The mechanical shikigami Hama, who ought to have been stopped, suddenly revved its engine. Kyouko stood up from the backseat.

"Touji!"

She shouted at Touji, who had been confronting Kagami.

"Tenma's in there!"

Touji was taken aback. "What..." Harutora also fell silent. Speaking of which, Tenma had disappeared after yelling at Suzuka back then.

He had gone to Kanda Shrine in the midst of this intense battle, without anyone noticing him.

On the other hand, Suzuka acted quickly in order to deal with the crisis. Since she was in the air seated on her shikigami, she seemed capable of observing the situation inside the territory to some extent. She was confused, but fearlessly rushed out into the air towards the territory filled with exploding magic.

Touji had also charged up the ruined road, eyeing Kanda Shrine. Though Kagami saw him, he didn't stop Touji. Harutora also used the Raven's Wing at that time.

No matter what kind of dilemma they were in, they couldn't leave their comrade - their friend - to die. Harutora hurried over, carrying Natsume.

But Touji, who watched Harutora rushing over as he also immediately rushed into Zuishin-mon, stopped when he felt the presences there.

From the other side charged out a fat shorty and a half-naked woman. They were Doman's shikigami, Gozu and Mezu. As they had thought, the powerful magical energy that had appeared inside the territory belonged to Ashiya Doman.

Gozu and Mezu carried Ohtomo and Tenma.

Then,

"You guys, run!"

Carrying Ohtomo, he charged down the destroyed road without stopping. Kagami looked at the unconscious Ohtomo and yelled "What! Hey!".

Doman stayed behind inside the territory, confronting the god alone. That frightful magical power had succeeded in sealing the Soumas' actions. To think he had hidden such a level of strength. No one had

known.

...No! That wasn't it.

If that were Doman's strength, Gozu and Mezu wouldn't have run away. They were Doman's shikigami. Shikigami wouldn't leave their master behind and flee unless they were ordered to by their master. The fact that they carried Ohtomo and Tenma out was proof. Doman had probably ordered them to take Tenma and Ohtomo and flee. In the end, Doman's offensive was just purely to buy time.

...Flee?

He instinctively felt restless.

If they fled, nothing would be solved. There was no future if they didn't defeat the Souma. That was extremely clear.

But if they stayed here, they would be completely and utterly destroyed. Not just him and Natsume, all his other companions would be implicated.

"...!"

Harutora abandoned the confusion that trapped him. He prepared to flee. Though he hadn't thought of anything, he couldn't give up here.

Harutora gritted his teeth and closed his eyes--

"All of you, get in Hama!"

He ran out as he said this. Harutora's black coat was blown up by the wind and flapped out behind him like a pair of wings.

The mechanical shikigami Hama drove straight up to the shrine road, knowing that Tenma was being carried over. Seeing Harutora also racing down, Gozu, Mezu, and Touji also quickly ran to Hama.

"H-Harutora!?"

"Kyouko. I'm leaving Natsume to you!"



They hadn't spoken since that summer day. With no time to deal with Kyouko's surprise, Harutora gave the unconscious Natsume to Hakuou, who was guarding Hama.

At the same time, he also confirmed the situation. Suzuka was already leaving Kanda Shrine, and it seemed like she was escaping with Akino. Akino, Ohtomo, and Tenma didn't seem to be at risk of death.

Doman was still stopping the enemy inside the shrine. But it seemed like he had already passed his limits, as he could already see the magical energy weakening. To think that Ashiya Doman had done something so self-sacrificing. Honestly, he couldn't believe it, but he could think of the reasons later.

He didn't know what Kagami would do, but he was already quite exhausted. Even if he impeded them, they would be able to break through.

Then, there was only one obstacle left.

".....From my point of view, I have to stop you here."

Miyachi looked over from where he stood, clacking his prayer beads.

He still hadn't recovered completely. Of course, he was still powerful, there was no mistaking it!

"Don't look down on me!"

The feathers of the black Raven's Wing became a volley of arrows that attacked Miyachi.

Miyachi swung his prayer beads, making flame rise to burn all the feathers...! Right. When the summoned flames started to move, immediately,

"Order!"

The many water-element charms released together with the feathers circled around the flame that attacked the feathers and closed in on Miyachi from the side. Miyachi rapidly formed a seal to deal with the

torrent of water gushing at him.

Soon after, Miyachi's entire body was enveloped by flame. The water generated by the charm magic was instantly vaporized. Though water aura conquered fire aura, the water aura of mere water charms couldn't compare to Miyachi's supreme flame technique.

"Noumaku sarabatatagyateibyaku sarababokkeibyaku sarabatarata sendamakarashada kengyakigyaki sarababiginan untarata kanman...!"

Miyachi began chanting the Fire Realm magic again and the flame enveloping him increased. But that was enough for the first step of stopping Miyachi's movements.

Then,

"Harutora!"

Touji shouted from behind him. He glanced over, seeing that Touji had just sat down on Hama and that Natsume, Ohtomo, and Tenma were already there.

Hakuou and Kokfuu were defending the car to the best of their abilities. Gozu and Mezu were also on standby, with nerve-inducing expressionless faces. Suzuka and Akino were in the sky in front of them, heading out first.

Then, Kakugyouki appeared next to Hama holding Hishamaru. Upon seeing Kakugyouki's figure crackling all over with lag, Gozu said "General!?" in surprise and Mezu also put on a shocked expression.

But Kakugyouki didn't pay the shikigami any heed, glancing at Natsume and then nodding to Harutora.

"Go!"

Harutora shouted loudly. "Hama, let's go!" Touji ordered without the slightest hesitation. Just like when he had been asked to help Hishamaru before. A great combination. This was proof that their friendship still thrived after much time and many trials.

Miyachi narrowed his eyes at Hama as it prepared to depart.

Wreathed in fire and purged of any personal emotions, he looked like a cruel Acala[26].

The flame extended towards Hama like a snake.

But Harutora wouldn't let it interfere.

"Nounaku sanmanda bazaradan sendamakaroshada sowataya untarata kanman."

Forming a seal with his right hand, Harutora chanted one of Acala's mantras (another of which was Fire Realm), a protection magic. Miyachi ignored his slight surprise and attacked from the front with Fire Realm. At the same time, Harutora drew out a charm with his left hand and accurately threw it out.

The protection magic melded together with the Fire Realm. They were both fire arts of Acala, so they didn't neutralize each other, but instead the stronger one absorbed the other. Hence, Miyachi's fire realm grew in might. He had been surprised just now because he wouldn't have thought Harutora would make such an error.

But that was the point!

"Guide the flame and return ash to the earth! Fire generates earth! Order!"

The Fire Realm magic, which was mixed with Harutora's fire aura due to the protection magic that had melded away, reacted. Another magic hidden inside the protection magic was activated, and the thrown earth-element charm absorbed the fire aura.

And, Harutora's fire aura became a lure that caused Miyachi's own fire aura to flow into the earth-element charm.

"Hm!?" Miyachi's eyes widened. The moment he noticed Harutora's intentions, Harutora's charm magic, fueled by his own Fire Realm, was approaching.

A huge noise roared and the ground split into two. Miyachi immediately put up a barrier. Spirit flow spurted forth, swallowing him along with his barrier and pulling them underground.

A counter to the Fire Realm magic. It wouldn't work again, but more powerful of a fire user the target was, the greater the effect. If Miyachi was the target, the effect was immense.

Hama zoomed to the road.

But it still wasn't over. Miyachi was a National First-Class Onmyouji. He wasn't only good at Fire Realm magic[27].

"...Awaken, spirits of the earth! Wood conquers earth!"

More so than the fire arts, Miyachi's greatest strength was his unreasonable spiritual power. Miyachi controlled the five elements without the help of a charm, and his magical energy became wood aura that conquered Harutora's earth aura. The materialized magic soon bloomed and foliage sprouted from the fissure, becoming a tree that brought Miyachi back above ground.

But Harutora had already used the Raven's Wing to fly into the sky.

And,

"With fierce water, bloom with madness! Water generates wood, order!"

"Ugh!? Noumaku sanmanda bazaradan kan!"

Harutora's water-element charm. The water aura that he had deliberately distorted fed the wood aura that Miyachi generated. The branches of the explosively-growing tree suddenly began twisting, becoming a prison that sealed Miyachi in - and then that prison of wood aura was burnt away by Miyachi's Unmoving Mantra - a curse of Acala.

But by then, Hama was an adequate distance away. What Miyachi didn't have was mobility. Having successfully stopped the 'Fire Demon', Harutora escaped higher into the sky and immediately chased after Hama...

"Noumaku sanmanda bazaradan kan!"

Miyachi chanted the curse with a majestic might.

The instantly-formed fireball surpassed Harutora's imagination. It thundered as it pursued Hama. He had to defend - but all he could possibly do was jump into the fireball and use his own body as a shield. Harutora changed his trajectory, raising the Raven's Wing's defensive power as high as possible.

But just before Harutora jumped into the fireball, Miyachi's fireball was cut apart by a slash..

...Eh!?

He immediately looked back at the shrine road. "Tch!" Kagami, wielding Higekiri, clicked his tongue. The slash wasn't aimed at Harutora - it had clearly been aimed at the fireball.

...Kagami!

Why? But he didn't have the freedom to check. Harutora chased after Hama with a flap of the winged black coat.



He had let them get away, but that said, he had done everything he could.

".....Well, no helping it."

Miyachi exhaled, looking for Kagami on the sloped shrine road.

"I can't steal someone else's prey - is that what you mean?"

".....Shut up!"

Kagami put Higekiri on his shoulder, looking down unyieldingly at Miyachi.

"Let me first say that you're also planned as one of my prey. So,

getting on with it now would be fine."

Miyachi smiled without any malice and drew back, saying "No, not right now" in response to Kagami's strong-willed declaration.

"It seems like you broke the seal on your spiritual body. Go find a good doctor as soon as you can, if you truly want to fight."

Kagami stared wordlessly at his smiling former superior.

Then, he looked up the slope as if suddenly noticing something.

Inside the territory of Kanda Shrine, the presence of Ashiya Doman's magic had vanished. The time that the ara-mitama had sacrificed himself to buy was now up.

Kagami readied himself and Miyachi narrowed his eyes.

From the territory-turned-secret-world that the two of them looked at can two dependents obeying their god.

## Part 3

He quickly caught up with Hama.

Waiting for him was Suzuka sitting on her shikigami. She approached Harutora mid-flight and flew next to him.

"Bakatora!"

Her loud, scolding voice quavered. Of course, Harutora didn't have anything to retort.

"Suzuka..... It's been a while."

"What the hell do you mean, it's been a while!? Liar! You said you'd come back with Natsume, you said you'd come back!"

"Yeah, sorry. Honestly. It's been delayed."

Harutora's heart was filled with warmth from Suzuka's moistened eyes. Speaking of which, they had been flying next to each other in the sky like this when he left.

He had returned.

Finally. The many emotions crowding his heart were hard to overcome.

"Come with me."

Saying that, he descended to Hama. Suzuka followed without saying anything at all.

"Ah!"

Suddenly, Akino cried out from next to Suzuka.

"Ah! Ah! I thought of it! Harutora-kun - Sensei! I, I have a message for you!"

Saying that, she reached out, ignoring the shikigami's balance. Suzuka froze out of panic.

"Sorry, tell me later."

"B-But!"

"Rabbit ears! Stop crawling around!!"

Harutora landed on the edge of Hama's chassis, leaving Suzuka's wobbling shikigami behind. "Harutora-kun!" The first one to call out to him was Tenma, who had seen the black coat in the rearview mirror from the driver's seat. He had fainted while being carried out, but it looked like he was awake now. Fortunately, he didn't look hurt.

Hakuou and Kokfuu seemed to have dematerialized, but the interior was still cramped. Other than Tenma in the driver's seat, Hishamaru and Kakugyouki were in the passenger's seat, the unconscious Natsume and Ohtomo lay in the backseat, with Kyouko to their right looking after their conditions. Further to the right was Touji, who had re-sealed himself. Mezu had been stuffed into the trunk[28], and Gozu was on the roof since his body took up a lot of space. Hama would have been unable to move long ago if it weren't armored[29].

With his back against the passenger seat, Kakugyouki leaned against the door, an elbow hanging outside the window.

He looked up at Harutora.

"...You got him, huh."

He smiled wryly.

Kakugyouki's giant body was wracked by lag no less than Hishamaru's. Honestly, it was a wound that threatened his continued existence. Harutora felt pain deep inside his heart.

"We're trying to isolate Hishamaru with a barrier for now, but isn't that meaningless from this close?"

".....No, it's not a problem of distance anymore, ever since the two of them became aware of each other....."



"I see."

Kakugyouki replied tersely. That voice and his expression didn't give away any of his inner feelings. But even so, he still conveyed the same sorrowful emotion as Harutora felt.

Suzuka on the shikigami also descended next to Hama and flew next to it. Akino tried to say something again, but before that, Touji spoke to 'Harutora' as the representative of the friends.

"There are a lot of things I want to ask, but right now Natsume's the most important. Something similar happened to her before. What's the reason? Can you deal with it?"

Touji's question didn't blame Harutora. But that question increased the sorrow in Harutora's heart.

There was no longer any reason to hide it.

"I....."

Harutora fished for an explanation.

"During the summer two years ago, I performed the Taizan Fukun Ritual in order to wake Natsume. Then..... I failed."

"Failed? But Natsume--"

"More accurately, I half-succeeded. I summoned Natsume's soul. It returned..... but two souls responded to my call. One was Natsume's dead soul, and the other was....."

Saying that, Harutora cast a gaze at the loyal defensive familiar sleeping in the passenger seat.

"Hishamaru..... my shikigami who's unconscious over there. Natsume and Hishamaru have the same soul..... Or more accurately, Natsume and Hishamaru's soul are the same thing. Normally that would be impossible. It definitely shouldn't happen. But no matter how I investigated, I came to the same conclusion."

"If they're the same....."

Touji and Tenma couldn't respond to what Harutora said. Also, they couldn't imagine what having the same soul meant. Actually, Harutora couldn't completely understand it either. Even Harutora - or perhaps Yakou - couldn't completely understand what human souls were. You could even say that they were things that couldn't be understood.

But one person,

"No way!?"

The one who objected was Suzuka, who had researched soul magic on her own before.

"The same soul can't exist in two different places at the same time, that's impossible!"

"Yeah. If it did, it could only be something like a phase five..... something like a god's vessel."

"That's a completely different meaning! That's dispersed aura spread over a wide area. It's not splitting a soul into two and taking physical form!"

Suzuka was right. The hypothesis that Natsume was a vessel constructed for a 'god' violated a premise. And Hishamaru - who had been a human girl before becoming a spiritual entity - had a soul formed before the war. And after Yakou died, she gave up her physical body to become a spiritual entity, existing up through the present. She had existed in this world as Hishamaru long before Natsume had been born.

Then had Natsume's soul been split off from Hishamaru's? Judging by the defensive familiar, there was no evidence of that. Hishamaru had lost many memories when she released the Tsuchimikado seal. But even so, if something as unreasonable as soul splitting had happened, she should have remembered it. Further, even if she herself didn't remember, there ought to be spiritual 'scars' left behind. But there was nothing that pointed to that kind of possibility.

He had thought of everything else that he could. But not a single one

could explain the current situation.

He had noticed the situation when Hishamaru had suddenly lost consciousness, just like today, while he was performing the Taizan Fukun Ritual. What he noticed because of that had stumped Kakugyouki and Saotome Suzu as well. He recognized that the same soul was living in two entities, but he still couldn't predict what kind of effects that soul would have.

"W-Wait. Harutora, this Hishamaru person is Kon-chan, right?"

She hastily looked back at Hishamaru again.

The seductive beauty sleeping next to them was a bit different from the loyal little girl that they knew.

The others were all stunned upon recognizing Hishamaru's fox ears.

"Kon-chan and Natsume-chan were together all the time before, so why didn't it happen until now?"

".....I think there are many overlapping reasons. For example, Hishamaru - Kon - was being sealed by a powerful spell when the two of them were next to each other. In other words, the seal kept Natsume's duplicate soul in a very suppressed state."

And then, since she had released the seal, Hishamaru had regained her original soul, and as a result, had become more resonant with Natsume.

"But....."

Harutora spoke carefully, seeming very troubled.

"The direct cause is the Taizan Fukun Ritual. Before that, these two unusual souls were completely oblivious to each other, and they only interacted once I called them back. Also, one side was in a critical condition, and the other side forced open the seal and ended up in a fragmented state....."

Harutora glanced at Natsume with a pained look as he spoke, then also looked at Hishamaru.

Magic that controlled souls was forbidden. The reason it was forbidden was because of the danger. He had realized the consequences, but hadn't been conscious enough. As a result, his companions had gotten involved.

Forbidden magic was a game that involved not just one's own self, but also 'part of the world'. Even now, the words Kogure said[\[30\]](#) pained his heart.

"Anyways, in that condition, even if Natsume's soul returned to her body I wasn't sure what other side effects there would be. ....No, what's more important was that I realized the chance of success would be very low. So there was nothing I could do to restore her to normal except for emergency measures!"

Harutora let out a long sigh as he spoke.

"And so, that Taizan Fukun Ritual to call back Natsume has continued all the way through tonight."[\[31\]](#)

The condition that had befallen Natsume and Hishamaru was very difficult to explain formally. Harutora explained it using the magic theories of General Onmyoudou and Imperial Onmyoudou, but those theories were incomplete with regard to souls and gods. It was hard to say whether those theories could even be completed.

But there were things that they could be certain of.

"This 'cheating' can no longer be concealed. Natsume and Hishamaru are both at their limits. And..... there's the advent of Tairan no Masakado. The spiritual nature around Kanda Shrine is already changing. With their conditions, the two of them won't be able to handle that change....."

Harutora said haltingly. "No way." Kyouko clenched her fists tightly in front of her.

Then, as if to prove Harutora's words, a spiritual flow of yin aura burst forth right underneath the rode Hama was driving on. Perhaps spiritual disasters would soon be happening all over the city if left alone. Right now it couldn't be said whether it would become a

history-making great spiritual disaster like those of the past. But it wouldn't be odd if the situation took a turn for the worse.

Suzuka was also silent, her face pale. She, who was familiar with the Taizan Fukun Ritual and soul magic, was also unable to think of a countermeasure.

No one said anything as Hama drove like the wind.

Just then,

"U-Um!"

Akino raised her voice.

But,

"Sorry for interrupting this somber atmosphere, but they're here."

Mezu warned them. She was standing up in the back, staring at the road they had come from - towards the direction of Kanda Shrine.

Immediately afterwards,

"...Master. The two shikigami we confirmed in the shrine before are approaching from behind. They're moving straight for us, so they will catch up very soon."

It was definitely Yashamaru and Kumomaru. "Damn." Harutora turned backwards and cursed. It seemed that his judgment that they probably weren't being pursued, had been incorrect.

Gozu stood up from the roof of the vehicle.

"...At the end, master told us to stay with this white-hair for now. If you're gonna go for 'em, I'll help you out."

"Thanks for the assistance. In that case, take care of defending. Hama, keep on driving. Their target is probably me. I'll hold them off and buy time--"

"Hah? Are you sleeptalking? Harutora."

"Touji!"

"There's no time, so let's skip the nonsense. Let's decide the strategy. Any objections?"

"None."

"Nope."

"How could there be!?"

Tenma, Kyouko, and Suzuka replied. A perfect combination, and a conversation with no openings to butt in.

Harutora bit his lip.

This was different from the battle in Ogikubo. Their master Takiko was possessed by Taira no Masakado, so the Yase Dojis' strengths should be tremendously higher than before. In contrast, they had Hishamaru, Natsume, and Natsume who were unable to move. Kakugyouki was also practically unable to fight. Even if Gozu and Mezu helped, they honestly had no chance of winning.

But it was plain as day that Touji and the others weren't retreating.

...What should he do.....!?

Harutora felt depressed.

"Th-The Yaoyorozu no Kami are omnipresent! In all ages! Always! At the same time!"

She shouted loudly with her eyes shut and face red.

Everyone looked at Akino, stunned by the overly sudden occurrence. Harutora did as well. In that moment, he was so surprised that he forgot their current situation.

Then, Akino continued talking.

"If you integrate everything right now, you just need to send the spirit over, so..."

Seemingly about to cry, Akino opened her eyes and looked straight at Harutora as she spoke.

"So control 'time'!"

Suddenly.

Harutora's thinking stopped.

But that was only a superficial layer of thinking.

Harutora stopped completely understanding for a time.

Then, his heart and mind were set free.

It wasn't something that he had noticed. Rather, he changed after hearing Akino's words.

His thinking opened up.

His knowledge ran out of control.

The loud roar of instinct that surpassed memory.

It reached out to his soul.

Towards an answer.

All of this happened in a moment, the blink of an eye. Then, in that moment, all of the anguish and frustration he had been battling since the night two summers ago, for a year and eight months, vanished. A single moment.

A different way of thinking.

Combining things that were impossible. That didn't mean changing the current situation. If the situation he had caused became 'an impossible event', then all was well. Of course, he had never seen that done, nor had he ever heard of it. But truth didn't reject possibilities. Perhaps it even opened the door to possibilities. This was an instance of a new possibility.

In other words...

The 'reason' for all of this was Harutora.

".....!"

A stillness that seemed like an eternity passed by.

Harutora said,

".....Who left that message?"

Akino put on an 'eh?' expression. Her ears swayed back and forth in seeming confusion.

"A-A god...?"

She replied.

Okay, god. Harutora firmly declared.

If you're wrong, I'll curse you for eternity.

"...Is that good news, Harutora?"

Kakugyouki, who had silently watched things unfold, said quietly.  
"Yeah." Harutora replied brusquely.

"It's... a final gamble."

"What exactly is going on? Can you save Natsume or not?"

"I don't know, but..."

So he had to move right away. And he would have to get rid of the two Yase Doji chasing him. That was extremely difficult - or maybe impossible. Harutora looked back, thinking desperately of a way.

But,

".....Okay, Tenma, let's stop."

"Hey, Hama, stop."

Touji spoke and Tenma gave a quiet order. Hama braked and



stopped, obeying his master's order. "Hey!" Harutora panicked.

"What are you doing!?"

"Bakatora. You're too easy to read. In any case, we have to stop the pursuers."

"We'll do whatever we can to stop them. Kyouko-chan. Suzuka-chan."

"Right. That said, I don't know how much use Hakuou and Kokfuu will be."

"Speaking of which, this is a waste of time, hurry up and go. ...Ah, take her with you. She gets in the way."

Suzuka said, pushing Akino's shoulder at the end.

Harutora didn't know what to say.

Touji smiled resignedly, standing up from the seat and pressing a charm to Harutora's chest. It was a shikigami charm.

Yukikaze. The white horse shikigami that served the Tsuchimikado family.

"I've been holding onto this since two years ago. I wanted to return it, but that Natsume could fly with her own draconic aura, so I carried it just in case. If you flew carrying Natsume and Kor - or Hishamaru? - it would be a disaster if they both woke up."

Touji said teasingly. "Go," he repeated.

"It's not for you. It's for Natsume."

Harutora looked at his companions. But Touji, Kyouko, Tenma, Suzuka, and everyone was smiling proudly.

At the end, Harutora looked at Kakugyouki.

The one-armed oni who he had fought together with in times of turmoil. While he suffered intense lag,

"As I thought, you have the ability to draw others to you."

He looked at his master with a smirk.

Then,



"Anyways, this is your fate. Give up, Tsuchimikado. Go... wake Hishamaru. I want to see your ending."

## Part 4

This event happened many nights ago--

This place had no 'time' or 'location' - the concepts and meanings were different, and it was inexplicable and very strange, but it was a continuous space. The boundaries between him and the world had become vague, and he didn't know where he was at all.

The concept of "where" didn't exist.

He was one with the world.

He 'existed' in all places and all times.

Because time didn't exist, he didn't feel anything no matter how long he lingered there. Or maybe there wasn't even such a concept.

But, suddenly...

He could hear someone's voice.

That solemn voice was calling a name. A voice filled with spiritual power - the power to guide souls. The voice was filled with thoughts of the other as it called the name.

The one whose name was being called by the voice separated from the world. The separated entity began slowly understanding its own existence.

That was the most fundamental use of 'magic'.

The voice called. Come back. A call filled with prayer. She wanted to go back.

So - she went back.

The moment yin and yang overlapped. Right before dawn, black night was enveloped by the light of the sun.

On an altar high above the ground, she saw her original world. A vast city, seemingly without end.

The altar was tightly linked with the place she had just been. Also, he was on the altar. The practitioner of 'magic' calling for her. He was a familiar person. The person she loved the most. His voice and his aura had contained his feelings, pulling her back to his side.

Then, she noticed.

There was another 'her' on the altar.

The other 'her' had the same shocked face, as if 'she' had just noticed her. Surprise, disbelief, confusion. It felt like she had lost her individuality.

I'm.....



...Ah.

The first thing she felt was coldness and warmth.

A cold wind blew. Her skin, which was exposed to the air, felt the cold. But for some reason her body felt very warm, as if it were in contact with some kind of warmth.

Then, she noticed the place she was. It felt wrong.

It felt like her body wasn't touching the ground. She was floating, and moving.

Eh? Natsume moved her body.

"Natsume!?"

Her heart almost stopped upon hearing the voice from next to her.

Harutora looked over.

Harutora and Natsume struggled in a panic as she reflexively pushed away from him. Then, she finally realized. Harutora was carrying her right now. And they were flying in the air.

That was why Natsume had seen that dream. She had seen similar things before, actually. On the bed of a hotel, Harutora had looked at her, who should have been dead. He had told her a secret and honestly conveyed his feelings. Then.....

A dreamlike dream[32]. A illusion of sleep.

Or maybe was everything that had happened all just a dream? Maybe after she woke up, she would be in class at the Onmyou Academy, irritatedly lecturing Harutora because his academic grades hadn't improved at all[33].

Touji, Kyouko, and Tenma were in the same classroom. Suzuka would show up during breaks. After lecture started, Ohtomo-sensei would come in and say something like 'hey, everyone sit down', with a wry smile.

She had lost her life, and then been resurrected, but not completely resurrected.

The daily life she had before then was completely lost.

She might as well die. So she wanted to just float away with the wind. But, she knew that everyone was desperately moving forward for her.

She knew that everyone, that Harutora, was there, albeit in a different place.

She was always searching. She wanted to know the reason. She just wanted to see them. Searching, chasing. Just missing. Being left behind.

Was it all a dream?

Because Harutora was so close.

"Are you awake? I don't believe it. Are you conscious? Do you still

recognize me?"

"...Harutora-kun..."

"Natsume...!"

Tears welled in Harutora's eyes as he hugged Natsume. W-What!? Natsume was thrown afluster, but Harutora didn't pay it any heed. Her face was extremely red. It didn't matter if this was a dream, but why...

"Natsume!? I can't believe it!"

That voice was Akino's. Looking at the place the voice came from, Natsume saw that she was riding a white horse that flew in the sky behind Harutora. The white horse was Yukikaze. But Akino wasn't the only one on Yukikaze's back - there was one more person. An exhausted-looking woman leaned against Akino's back. Though she wore a military uniform, the most attention-grabbing part of her were the two fur-covered ears on her head. Also, Natsume could see a leaf-shaped tail behind her back.

Natsume's eyes widened.

...The one from that time.....

For a moment, she couldn't think of exactly when 'that time' had been. But when Natsume saw her eyes, why was it that her reaction, feelings, and emotions were completely the same as 'that time'?

Roughly speaking, it was like looking at herself from the outside through a window of the soul..... No, she had a similar experience. Hokuto. It was similar to the feeling from when she used her simple shikigami Hokuto<sup>[34]</sup>, and how looking into Hokuto's eyes was like seeing herself. Though they were completely different, Hokuto felt like 'her'.

"Why..."

"Hold on, I'll explain, so calm down first."

Harutora said as he looked ahead.



Natsume tilted her head, looking at the scene below. Tokyo's nighttime scenery spread out below her. But it was different from usual. She could 'see' unstable spirit flow. It was a bit different from what had been at the altar of the Tenchuu Chifu Ritual.

"Ah."

Then, Natsume finally thought of what had happened before she lost consciousness.

The Tenchuu Chifu Ritual in Kanda Shrine. She had headed over and instantly lost consciousness. What had happened afterwards? What about the others? Why was it that Akino, who ought to have been captured, was with them, and everyone else wasn't?

...We...

Had they lost?

As an icy terror came over her,

"Calm down."

Harutora looked back and said.

Across from him, they approached a tall building. It was the academy building of the Onmyou Academy. And on the roof were four torii surrounding a stone platform.

Thump. Natsume's heart leaped powerfully.

Harutora headed straight for the stone platform of the altar and stood there. Yukikaze followed closely behind him, whinnying and kicking the ground next to the platform. Akino carried Hishamaru to the roof, almost falling off the horse.

"H-Harutora-kun..... What exactly is happening....."

When she realized it, her body was trembling. Natsume sat on the stone platform, unable to stand up. Harutora knelt in front of her, grabbing her shoulders and facing her.

"Natsume. There's no time anymore. It's already a miracle that you're conscious. So listen to what I'm about to say, alright?"

Harutora's one eye looked into Natsume's.

Harutora slowly spoke, word by word, with a powerful tone. His atmosphere pushed away the fog clouding Natsume's head, and she nodded.

Harutora also knew that Natsume was capable. But there truly was no time. He emotionlessly, indifferently, and concisely explained the current situation to her.

Touji and the others fighting. Ohtomo's attack and injuries. The advent of Taira no Masakado. Akino's rescue and their escape. And now, Touji and the others desperately stopping the Yase Doji pursuing them. Harutoar bringing Natsume here with the time they bought.

Harutora wanted to convey the objective truth, which was why he focused on what he could glean about events during her unconsciousness.

Then, Harutora also told Natsume about the problem with her soul.

Natsume's soul and Kon's - Hishamaru's soul were 'the same thing'.

"Do you have any idea why?"

Harutora asked, clinging to a sliver of hope, but of course Natsume had no clue. Actually, she still didn't really understand what Harutora had said.

...Me and Kon?

She had learned of Kon's true identity from Yasuzumi while living in hiding. She had been extremely surprised when she first heard of it. After all, Hishamaru was a legendary shikigami. It was extremely hard to believe that she was Kon. But more importantly, about her soul - it didn't feel realistic at all that she had 'the same soul as Natsume', as Harutora had said.

She didn't feel they had anything in common, except perhaps their feelings for Harutora. She had felt it when hearing about Hishamaru from Yasuzumi. Hishamaru's feelings for her master, hidden in the depths of her loyalty.

But she didn't think that was any clue.

Natsume slowly shook her head, the blood drained out of her face.

Then, Harutora said,

"I see, oh well."

He resolutely nodded instead.

"If what I'm going to do now is the right thing to do, then if there's any clue it's Hishamaru who has it."

"Right now.....?"

Natsume asked, not understanding his meaning. Harutora's expression became grave and serious.

And after an intense struggle, he chose his final words:

"Natsume."

He spoke grimly.

"It's no longer the time to hide anything. So I'll say it clearly. I was unsuccessful in awakening you, so I ordered Hokuto to connect your soul to your body. But that's already reaching its limit. Your soul can no longer stay in this world."

Honestly, she had already unconsciously prepared herself back then.

But the moment Harutora faced her and told her outright, Natsume felt an impact she had never experienced before. Maybe dying would be better.

She had thought this before. But being able to meet Harutora again like this and then being told by Harutora about her unavoidable

death was far outside of Natsume's imagination.

It was fortunate that she didn't break down completely. Her mind went blank.

But,

"But, I won't give up on you."

Harutora continued speaking. That sentence warmed Natsume's heart.

"Right now, I'm going to undo the knot and send you there and back again. It will definitely succeed. No matter what. So..... trust me."

Harutora didn't concretely explain what he was going to do. Maybe it was because there was no time, but she could faintly tell that it was 'better' if she didn't know any more. How reckless. He wanted trust, but it was better for her not to know too much. And he had said such shocking words with a straight face. It seemed very strange to her. It was rude, insane, and ignorant of her feelings.

"Okay."

Natsume replied.

Then, as if suddenly thinking of what had happened before, she reached a hand out to the left side of Harutora's face.

Right now, the left side of Harutora's face was covered with an intricate eyepatch. There had once been a pentagram-shaped magical pattern here.

The mark that drew Harutora into the world of magic.

The fetters Natsume had given Harutora, that started everything.

While touching the traces of it,

"I trust you, Harutora-kun. But..... if you can... don't forget me... alright?"

Her voice trembled unconsciously. Harutora, do your best. She did

her utmost to smile at him.

"A shikigami who lies has to be punished, you know."

Harutora smiled back as if he were trying hard not to cry, and tightly gripped Natsume's extended hand.

Then,

"H-Harutora-kun! Um, H-Hishamaru-sama is...!"

Akino shouted, seeming unable to hold back. They saw that Hishamaru's body, which had been placed in the corner of the stone platform by Akino, was already experiencing lag as if it were about to vanish.

".....Ugh."

Hishamaru opened her eyes slightly, moaning in pain.

She looked over.

".....Harutora-sama....."

Suddenly.

Natsume felt the feeling that 'she' was being pulled somewhere. She began to panic. The moment Hishamaru called Harutora's name, she felt her connection to Hishamaru become stronger.

Harutora showed a grim experssion that she had never seen before.

"Akino, come!"

As he said that, he took off the Raven's Wing right there. He was immediately surrounded by scattered black feathers as the black coat turned into a three-legged cros - a yatagarasu.

"Wait for me! Hishamaru!" Saying that, he gripped Natsume's shoulders again.

"I'm starting."



".....Yeah."

After nodding to Natsume, Harutora let go and backed up . Then, he called out to his shikigami. "Full Moon! Raven's Wing!"

Having already been instructed during their trip here, Akino immediately moved behind Natsume's left and the yatagarasu jumped behind Natsume's right. Harutora, Akino, and the yatagarasu formed a triangle around Natsume.

".....The Yaoyorozu no Kami are present! .....They are present in all of spacetime!"

Staring into the vast night sky above him, Harutora quietly spoke as if to confirm something again.

Then, finally,

"Hokuto, after I give the signal..... Leave Natsume."

He ordered the other shikigami. The dragon connecting Natsume's soul.

Wind blew on the Onmyou Academy rooftop.

A slight presence of spring was hidden in the night wind.

Harutora proclaimed solemnly.

"Now, we begin the Taizan Fukun Ritual."

Natsume recoiled in surprise.

Magic to control souls. Though she had already anticipated this, the Taizan Fukun Ritual definitely had a bad impression. Based on the knowledge she had learned about the Taizan Fukun Ritual from Yasuzumi, on some level she knew that the Taizan Fukun Ritual wasn't the kind of magic Natsume thought it was. But the Taizan Fukun Ritual that Natsume knew of had never resulted in any thing good, along with all other soul-manipulating magic.

...No.....!

The one time was Harutora's reincarnation. Reincarnating him back to Natsume's side.

The Taizan Fukun Ritual had resurrected the ill-fated genius Onmyouji who had been born before the war into a laid-back, cheerful, and extremely gentle childhood friend.

"It's alright, Natsume! A god told me!"

Akino, with an extremely serious expression, encouraged her. "A god?" Natsume asked. Akino nodded vigorously to confirm. The yatagarasu cawed on the other side. Then, Harutora started chanting an incantation in front of her. It was a simpler spell than when she had peeked at Suzuka before. But it was longer, more meticulous, and more powerful.

Harutora's magic, created by Yakou.

Light surrounded Natsume. The light connected to the distant sky. Suddenly, her consciousness floated away. Her consciousness became hazy.

"Natsume!"

Harutora called out.

As she was enveloped by the curtain of light, she couldn't see Harutora's figure anymore. Natsume desperately looked ahead, holding back her feelings for her childhood friend, and smiled.

"No matter how many times it takes, no matter how long, we'll definitely meet again. Because I'm your - I'm your shikigami!" [\[35\]](#)

Then--





Natsume's soul left her body and flew to a different land, completing its reincarnation.



This child had no name.

A hated child, a nobody. She was disdained and ostracized. She always knew that he was such a being, even without anyone explaining it to her.

She wasn't taken care of or loved, she just purely 'existed' here day after day. She believed without a doubt that this would repeat until she died. That was her 'life'.

But, no, that wasn't the case.

Her life was full of waves, similar to others born in the same era.

So this was the beginning. A lively-spirited boy. He had cast off his family, entered a storehouse, opened a heavy door, and called out to the girl.

"Are you my shikigami? I see. You're weird."

A ray of light shining into the deep, dark night.

The true meaning of her 'life' began when she was illuminated by the light of that night<sup>[36]</sup>.

The boy seemed surprised, approaching the confused girl.

"Okay." With a word, he grabbed her hand and pulled her out.

Outside the storehouse.

A world she didn't know.

They crossed the porch, reaching its edge. From the edge they came to the courtyard.

A courtyard illuminated by the sun. She couldn't believe there was something so beautiful in this world. She stared, shocked at the world that was suddenly opened up.

The wind blew on that girl.

"Hey, you don't have a name, right?"

The girl nodded to that question, the ears on her head - the hated ears of a fox - trembled. Her tail swished left and right, seemingly wanting to hide itself.

The boy let go of the girl's hand, crossing his arms and looking at her. He stared hard at her ears and tail, then put a hand on his forehead and groaned.

Embarrassment showed on the girl's face.

But the boy didn't notice the girl's feelings. "Oh!" He nodded.

Then,

"You're a fox living spirit, so your name will be Kon. It's written '混'. Starting today, you're Tsuchimikado Kon."

Kon, her own name.

It was too sudden, so she was unable to process anything. Then, the boy suddenly put on a confused expression and lowered his head to glance at her.

".....Are you unhappy? Foxes go 'kon kon', so I thought it fit..... Maybe a cuter name would be better?"

It seemed like the boy had finally realized his rudeness and become flustered and unsettled.

Would she hate him? To the childishly anxious boy,

She shook her head a few times.

She wasn't good at speaking, because she had almost never spoken to anyone.

Even so, she did her best to speak.

'Thank you'

A quiet word of thanks.

The boy's mood immediately improved.

"No problem! I'm Yakou. Yakou, the light of the night. Let's get along well, Kon."

The boy gave his name, wearing a satisfied smiling face.

The smile like the sun made her feel warm. That's what the girl thought as she looked at the boy's smile, captivated.

The miracle of a certain summer day.

In a corner of a residence's courtyard, wild sunflowers flowering brilliantly watched the two young ones.



# Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ An object or vessel for attracting spirits.
2. ↑ A measure of floor space. Twenty jou means twenty tatami mats.
3. ↑ I'm not fully sure what this means either.
4. ↑ All metaphorical, of course.
5. ↑ Japanese-style hotel
6. ↑ In other words, they're winning so much that they don't need to do anything nasty to Yasuzumi.
7. ↑ An apartment with two rooms, a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen.
8. ↑ The Japanese believe that a man will face great adversities during the age of forty-two
9. ↑ <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/b7/Chokuban.svg/300px-Chokuban.svg.png> That divination tool he used in anime.
10. ↑ From sunset till 2am to 3.30am
11. ↑ Cemetery or Memorial.
12. ↑ The four gods refer to Azure Dragon of the East, the Vermilion Bird of the South, the White Tiger of the West, and the Black Turtle of the North. The two guardians of the Zuijinmon are named as 丰磐间戸神 and 栴磐间戸神, most people normally refer them as Minister of the Left and Minister of the Right. This temple is an actual temple located in Akihabara.
13. ↑ I am unsure if this is the correct translation of 日铎 and 月铎 as there isn't any pictures or information online. Japanese Raws of these terms has no hiragana for assisted reading.
14. ↑ A two-story main gate that marks the entrance to Kanda Shrine.
15. ↑ A bodhisattva of Mahayana Buddhism.
16. ↑ Basically, a mantra.
17. ↑ When pre-Yakou Harutora and co. broke into the Onmyou Agency.
18. ↑ In the sense of a heart attack or panic attack.

19. ↑ Kagami's the one thinking this.
20. ↑ 眷属. Take it as meaning someone who draws strength from.
21. ↑ In Japan, people only call each other by their first name when they're quite friendly with each other.
22. ↑ Once again, take this a meaning 'someone who draws strength from someone else'
23. ↑ I don't understand this metaphor either.
24. ↑ Formal term expressing 'uncountably many gods'
25. ↑ i.e. the owner is friendly with Doman.
26. ↑ A Buddhist deity associated with fire.
27. ↑ Could have fooled me there
28. ↑ Note that since Hama is modeled after a Humvee, this is either an open trunk, or the kind that's connected to the car interior.
29. ↑ Since armor is heavy, armored vehicles are built to move heavier loads.
30. ↑ Kogure says something along these lines in a previous volume as a warning to Harutora.
31. ↑ I believe this doesn't mean the ritual itself is still going on, but rather that the events of tonight were brought about by that ritual.
32. ↑ This is literal, according to my text.
33. ↑ Twist ending
34. ↑ The girl Hokuto from Volume 1, not the dragon.
35. ↑ I assume from the contents that Natsume says this, although it seems more like Natsume should have this line..
36. ↑ Kanji trickery. Yakou is written with the characters for 'night' and 'light'.

Download all your Fav Light Novels from [Just Light Novels](#)

Stay up to date On Light Novels updates by Joining our DISCORD  
group

